STRONGHOLDS OF THE BORDER REIVERS

Fortifications of the Anglo-Scottish Border 1296–1603



KEITH DURHAM

ILLUSTRATED BY GRAHAM TURNER

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KEITH DURHAM ILLUSTRATED BY GRAHAM TURNER

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the memory of Angus McBride, 1931–2007.

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ARTIST'S NOTE

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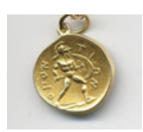
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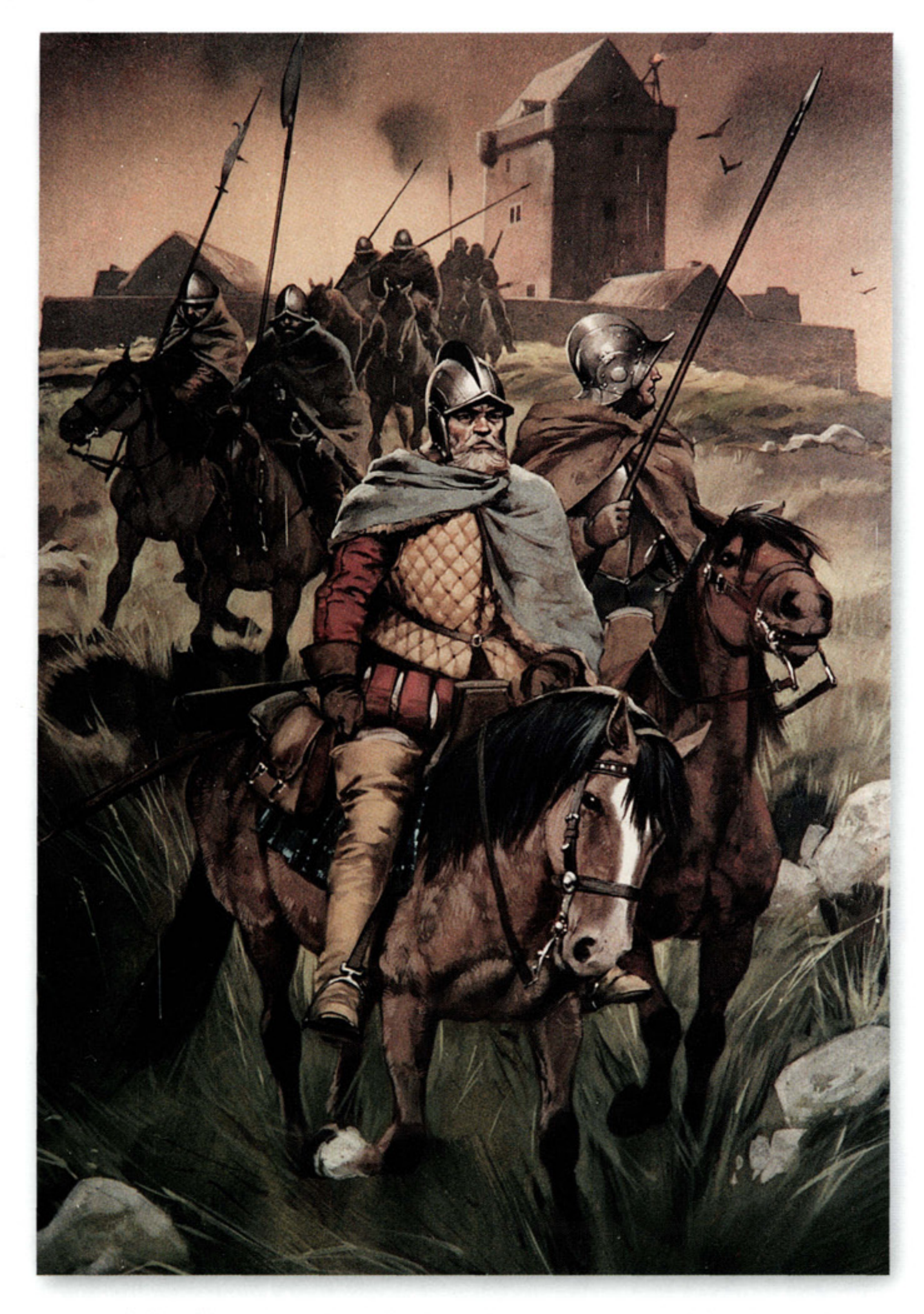
STRONGHOLDS OF THE BORDER REIVERS

INTRODUCTION

> Compleyenes [complainants] Bartrame Mylburne of the Keyme, Gynkne Hunter of the Waterhead in Tyndale, upon William Armstrong of Kinmowthe, Ecky Armestronge of the Gyngles, Thome Armstrong of the Gyngles, Thomas Armestonge called Androwes Thome, of the Gyngles, Johne Forster sone to Meikle Rowie of Genehawghe, George Amestronge, called Renyens Geordie, and his sons of Arcleton in Ewesdale, and there complices, for that thay and others to the number of thre hundrethe parsons in warlike maner ranne one opyn forrowe in the daye tyme, on Fridaie in the mornynge last, being xxxth of August, in Tyndale unto certen places that is to say the Keyme, the Reidhewghe, the Black Myddynes, the Hillhowse, the Waterhead, the Starr head, the Bog head, the High feelde, and ther raysed fyer and brunte [burnt] the most pairte of them, and maisterfullie refte [robbed], stale and drove awaye fowre hundrethe kyen [cows] and oxen, fowre hundrethe sheip, and goate, xxx horses and mears [mares], and spoyle and insight of the howses to the walewe of towe hundrethe pounds, and slewe and murdered crewellie six parsons, and maimed and hurte ellevin parsons, and tooke away xxx presoners, and them do deteigne and keip in warlyke maner, myndinge to ransom them contrarie the vertewe of trewes [truces] and lawes of the Marches. Wherof they aske redress.

In the year 1583, this catalogue of woes arrived on the desk of Sir Francis Walsingham, Secretary of State to Queen Elizabeth I. It came from Lord Scrope, Warden of the English West March, and was a further reminder of the 'broken state' of England's northern frontier. This 'compleynt' and claim for redress against the Armstrongs was yet another example of a seemingly endless stream of similar 'reiffis' (robberies), 'murtheris' (murders), 'birnyngs' and 'spoylings' that emanated from the Border. To Walsingham, sitting at the hub of government and deeply immersed in affairs of state, such barbaric behaviour must have seemed outlandish indeed. But to the likes of Gynkne (Jenkin) Hunter and Bartrame (Barty) Milburn, left impoverished and bereft, it was the grim reality of daily life on the Border Marches. Even their crudely built, defensible homes, referred to in contemporary documents as 'bastell-houses', were a direct result of a continuing legacy of three centuries of warfare, violence, lawlessness and systematic devastation that had left the Anglo-Scottish Border country in a pitiful state.

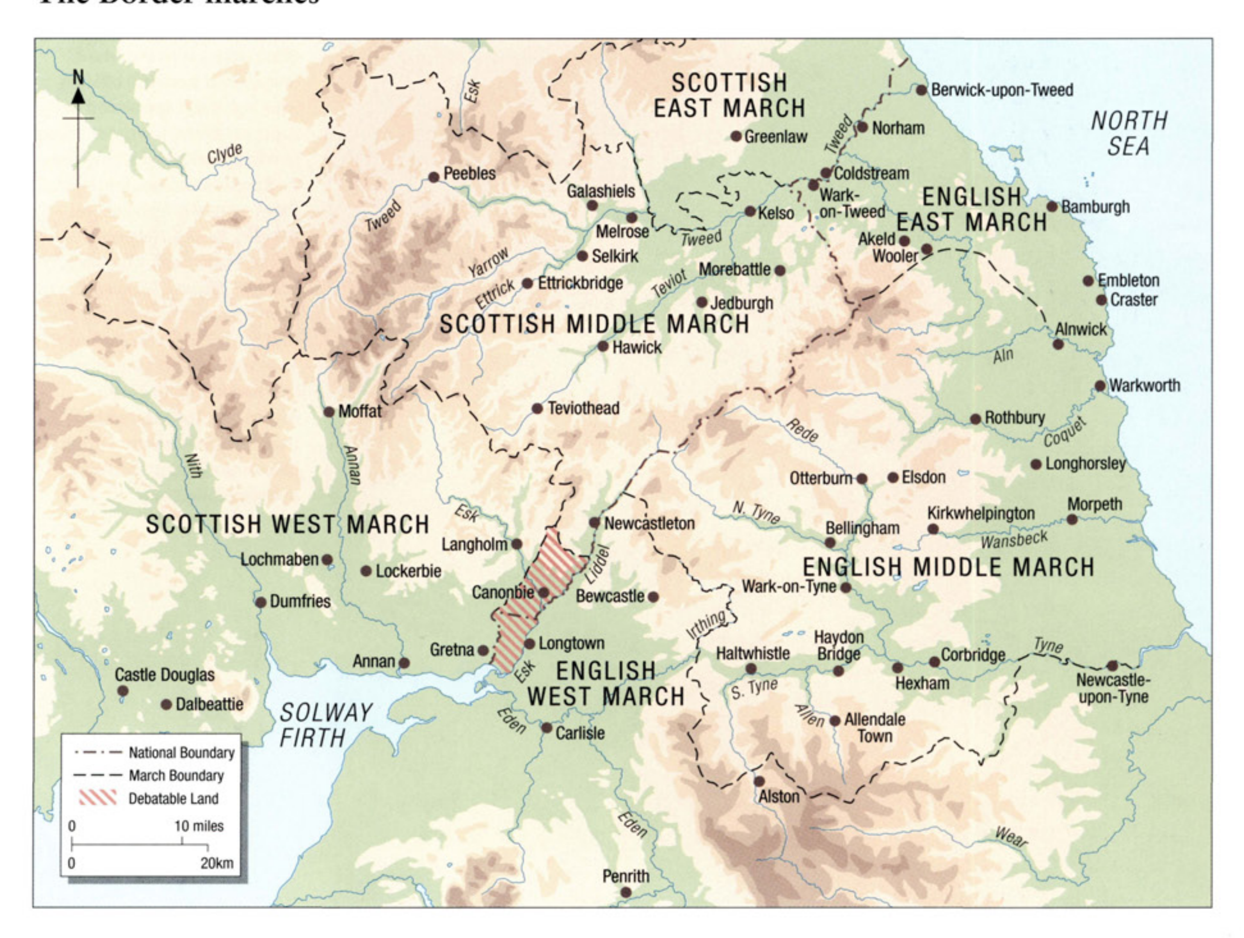
During the second half of the 13th century peace and prosperity reigned across the Borderland. Sharing a rugged landscape and a similar culture,



Border Reivers, 1585. Coming from all levels of society and often riding with the 'wynk' of approval from the officials who had been appointed to suppress them, the great riding families plundered across the six Border Marches. Amongst them were the Armstrongs, Burnses, Scotts, Robsons, Elliots, Halls, Bells, Charltons, Forsters, Nixons, Maxwells, Johnstones and the ubiquitous Grahams, They were cursed as 'ever ryding' and as reiving reached its zenith in the mid to late 16th century, they 'shook loose the Border'. (Illustration: Angus McBride, author's collection)

Border folk of both kingdoms had much in common and lived together in relative harmony. Border towns flourished, merchants and landowners prospered and farmers were able to enjoy the fruits of their labour. On a national level, however, each nation remained wary of the other's territorial ambitions and during this period of calm, the English in particular had taken the opportunity to strengthen their Border holds at Norham, Alnwick, Wark and Carlisle, as well as establishing efficient lines of communication along their northern frontier. When Scotland's king, Alexander III, was killed in a riding accident in 1286, he died heirless and in the absence of an obvious adult successor to the Scottish throne, the English monarch, Edward I, in furtherance of his plans for the total domination of Scotland, used his

The Border marches



influence to install John Balliol on the Scottish throne in 1292. Unfortunate and weak minded, Balliol was forced to recognize Edward as his feudal overlord and by a process of intimidation and humiliation, the English monarch proceeded to rule Scotland by proxy. In time, Edward's behaviour became so overbearing that Balliol, albeit under pressure from his council, eventually rebelled against him. In an act of defiance, the Scots negotiated a mutual defence agreement – which became know as the 'Auld Alliance' – with Edward's traditional enemy, France, and proceeded to lay siege to the English fortress at Carlisle. In a fury, Edward retaliated by launching a series of devastating invasions across the Border. In 1296, Berwick was stormed and in an act of sheer brutality the town's entire male population was put to the sword, earning Edward the epithet 'Hammer of the Scots'.

Recoiling from the initial impact, the Scots soon retaliated with equal ferocity and in 1297, under William Wallace, defeated the English at Stirling Bridge. As one outrage followed another, the two kingdoms became engulfed in a war of attrition that was destined to last for 300 years. The Borderland became their battleground and as the scavenging armies of both nations invaded and retreated across the 'line', towns and villages were put to the torch, their inhabitants' slaughtered, crops were looted or burnt and vast areas of arable land were reduced to impoverished wastelands. Wallace was later defeated at Falkirk in 1298, but in 1314 English ambitions for the subjugation of Scotland were dealt a crippling blow by Robert the Bruce, who gathered

the Scottish nobles to his cause and crushed the army of Edward II at Bannockburn. Bruce wrested Berwick from English hands in 1318 and his victorious Scottish armies plundered England's northern shires unopposed, exacting tribute and blackmail from the terrified population. After Bruce's death, Edward III defeated the Scots at Halidon Hill and Berwick was recaptured in 1333. Fifty years later the Scots were victorious at Otterburn and, in 1402, the English had their revenge at Homildon Hill. Although Berwick passed briefly into Scottish hands in 1461, it was retaken and finally ceded to the English in 1482. Both nations continued to mount sporadic raids and armed incursions that bedevilled the Border country and, in 1513, James IV of Scotland led a large-scale invasion into Northumberland, which culminated in a devastating defeat at Flodden Field, his own death and the loss of a significant proportion of Scotland's nobility. It was, without doubt, the worst military defeat in Scotland's history.

For the Borderland, worse was to come when 30 years later, Henry VIII attempted to contrive the marriage of the English Prince Edward to the infant Mary, Queen of Scots. Having failed to woo the Scots with a mixture of threats and diplomacy, the bellicose monarch attempted to force the union by means of a devastating show of military force and from 1544 to 1549, in a period that became known as the 'Rough Wooing', English armies supported by foreign mercenaries brought 'fyre and sword' to the Scottish Lowlands.

In this constant war of attrition, both governments encouraged their Borderers to harass their embattled neighbours across the line by way of incessant raiding and, even in periods of comparative peace between the two kingdoms, violence along the Borderline continued unabated. Inevitably, such appalling conditions bred a ruthless and resourceful society who had, by the beginning of the 16th century, become 'maisterful theeves' and rustlers, skilled in the arts of skirmish, raiding, ambush and extortion – they added the word 'blackmail' to the English language. (It was also recognized that they were by far the finest light horsemen of their day and in times of national conflict, both governments were quick to conscript Border horsemen into their armed forces as scouts or 'prickers'.)

Caught up in this vicious cycle of warfare, raiding and reprisal, survival became the most important element in the Borderer's uncertain life. Due to the ever-present threat of sudden violence descending upon him and his loved ones, the Borderer's well being lay firmly amongst his own clan or 'grayne' and his loyalty to his surname invariably overrode any national allegiance. It should also be borne in mind that raiding was not confined solely to forays into the opposite realm. Cross-border alliances were not uncommon and in 1525, it was noted that 'the Armstrangs of Liddersdaill and the theiffs of Ewysdaill were joined with the rebels of Tyndaill ... and kepet all company togedders'. When a suitable opportunity presented itself, formidable war bands such as these were certainly not averse to plundering amongst their own countrymen. As a consequence, even families who shared the same nationality lived in constant suspicion of each other and fickle loyalties led to bitter rivalry, which could suddenly escalate into open hostility and deadly feud.

In an attempt to impose some degree of law and order on what had become an anarchic society, both kingdoms had agreed to divide their Border territories into East, West and Middle Marches and appointed wardens and keepers to govern and police them. Between the west marches of each kingdom, however, was a narrow strip of territory known as the Debateable Land. Although both kingdoms hotly contested ownership of this small piece of ground, neither of

them was prepared to take responsibility for the crimes of the inhabitants and, as a consequence, it became the haunt of some of the most nefarious reiving bands and cutthroats in the Border country.

Amongst his many responsibilities, part of a warden's duty was to meet with his opposite number on truce days and dispense cross-border justice accordingly. Both governments acknowledged that the standard laws of the land were quite inadequate when dealing with such a violent and unruly populace and as a consequence the unique Border Laws, which specifically governed behaviour across the Border Marches, supplemented those laws. Legislation covered such criminal activities as aiding and abetting raids into one's own country, illegal marriage to a person from the opposite realm and the conditions that applied when engaged in the lawful pursuit of stolen goods, known as the 'Hot Trod'.

By the beginning of the 16th century, raiding, or 'reiving', had become a way of life and against this background it is hardly surprising that when these people built their homes, the emphasis was firmly on security. Fortified buildings on both sides of the Border ranged from large, well-defended castles to stark, imposing tower houses, fortified manor houses and defensible farmhouses known as bastles, a class of building unique in the British Isles. In addition, many churches were strengthened against attack and, in times of trouble, served as austere sanctuaries for their congregations.

CHRONOLOGY

Late 11th century	First motte and bailey castles appear in the Borders.
Late 13th century	Manor house is built at Aydon.
1296	Edward I of England invades the Scottish Lowlands and plunges both nations into 300 years of intermittent warfare.



Hebburn Bastle, Glendale, Northumberland. This small fortress is actually a stronghouse from the 15th century and is a good example of the rather haphazard designations that were applied to many Border strongholds. It stands about 2km from Chillingham Castle and looks out towards the Cheviot Hills. In the 16th century, Hebburn was able to house a garrison of 20 horsemen, whose unenviable task it was to thwart the nightly depredations of Scottish marauders.

14th century

1305	Manor house at Aydon is fortified.
1314	Robert the Bruce defeats the English at Bannockburn.
1316	Dunstanburgh Castle completed.
1300s	Vicar's Pele built at Corbridge; Thirlwall Castle erected and churches at Edlingham and Ancroft given defensible towers.
1332	Old Gaol completed at Hexham.
1360	Lord Dacre builds a fortified manor house at Hermitage in Liddesdale.
1370	Neidpath Castle built by Sir William Hay.
1371	The Douglases strengthen Hermitage Castle.

15th century

1400	Four corner towers added to Hermitage Castle.
1450s	Smailholm Tower built by the Pringles.
1450s	Hebburn 'Bastle', or stronghouse, built.
1456	Orchardton Tower constructed on a circular plan by John Cairns.
1497	James IV lays siege to Norham Castle.

16th century

1513	James IV defeated by Earl of Surrey at Flodden Field.
1523	Attack on Cessford Castle by the Earl of Surrey; Duke of Albany attacks the English castle at Wark-on-Tweed.
1544–49	The 'Rough Wooing'.
Mid-1500s	Tower houses built at Hollows and Elsdon.
1560s	Elizabethan fortifications constructed at Berwick.
1565	'Repentance' specifically built as a watchtower.
1581	Design of Greenknowe Tower marks shift in emphasis from fortified to domestic architecture.
1584	Stronghouse built at Doddington.
1560–1602	Bastle houses built at Hole, Low Cleughs and Woodhouses.
1603	James VI of Scotland is crowned James I of England and begins the pacification of the Borders.

DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

In the wake of the Norman Conquest in 1066, along with some revolutionary concepts of assault and defence, the invaders brought with them the feudal system. In return for 40 days' military service each year, Norman kings parcelled out extensive estates to loyal barons who in turn, and under the same obligation, granted manors to their own favoured knights. As a consequence, near the end of the 11th century, so-called motte and bailey castles began to appear at strategic locations in and around the Border country.

To the Normans, still being a minority occupying force in what was essentially hostile territory, these strongholds became powerful bases from which they consolidated their authority. Each castle accommodated a garrison and by using small but highly effective cavalry units, the Norman aristocracy were able to dominate the surrounding countryside and control the local population.



Robert de Umfraville's 11th-century motte and bailey castle at Elsdon in Redesdale, Northumberland, was constructed by modifying a natural spur of land that overlooked the village and the road that passed through it. The impressive earthworks comprise a ringwork over 40m in diameter and an extensive bailey, both surrounded by deep ditches and protected by substantial ramparts. Note the 16th-century tower house standing at far left.

As a rule, these castles were constructed from earth and timber. If possible, when choosing a site a natural feature in the landscape would be utilized, such as a hill or spur that could be fashioned into the required shape. Initially, a large, steep-sided and level platform was created, which formed the bailey. This area, often oval in shape and surrounded by a ditch, was then enclosed with an earthen rampart, which was defended by a wooden palisade and a heavily fortified gate tower. The bailey contained domestic buildings that would have included a barrack room, stables, a kitchen, a blacksmith's shop and a chapel.

Access to the motte was by means of a long, sloping stairway, which bridged the deep ditch separating it from the bailey. The summit of the motte was crowned with a palisade and inside this lofty enclosure rose a substantial, timber-built tower that housed the lord and his family. If necessary, this building could also serve as a final refuge should the bailey be overrun.

An almost perfect example of this kind of earthwork can be seen at Elsdon in Redesdale, Northumberland. It was in all probability constructed around the end of the 11th century by Robert de Umfraville as a power base from which he could defend his lordship of Redesdale. The castle's timber defences were never replaced in stone and the site was eventually abandoned in favour of a motte and bailey castle at Harbottle. Consequently, the earthworks at Elsdon have remained remarkably undisturbed and even after 900 years of natural erosion the site remains the finest example of its kind in Northumberland.

The great castles of Warkworth, Alnwick, Norham and Prudhoe were associated with mottes and in the mid-12th century, when King David I of Scotland invited Norman knights across the border and granted them lands to be held in return for military assistance, mottes were built at Selkirk, Peebles and Hawick, and a powerful ringwork and bailey was constructed in the mid-13th century at Hermitage in Liddesdale.

In spite of their formidable earthworks these timber fortresses were still dangerously susceptible to attack by fire or undermining and Norman overlords soon began to surround their enclosures with walls of stone. The main gate to the bailey was defended by a strong, stone-built tower and stone walls also began to replace the wooden palisade surrounding the summit of the motte, creating what became known as a shell keep. In time, the buildings contained within were also remodelled in stone. The first stone-built keeps began to appear in the region around the mid-12th century, one of the finest being erected at Norham on the site of a motte and bailey originally built by Bishop Flambard of Durham.

Norham Castle

The northernmost outpost of the County Palatine of Durham, the fortress was strategically situated on steep banks high above a bend in the Tweed and guarded an important crossing point on the river. In 1136 and 1138, the original stronghold of earth and timber was sacked twice by the Scots and, on the instructions of Henry II, Bishop Hugh de Puiset rebuilt the castle in stone between 1157 and 1160.

The new fortress was protected on its southern and western sides by broad, steep ditches and on its eastern side by a deep ravine. To the north, steep banks fell sharply to the Tweed below. Standing within the inner ward (formerly the shell keep) the massive keep was initially three storeys high, and consisted of two floors above a barrel-vaulted basement that was divided into three chambers. Although the keep was heightened to five storeys in 1423, its original pitched roofline is still clearly visible on the east wall. Built of pale red sandstone with walls between 3.6 and 4.6m thick, the keep is typically Norman in style and measures 25.6 by 18.3m. Even now its towering walls stand almost 27.4m high. Originally, access to the keep was gained via an external stone staircase that led to a door at first-floor level in the north side, but in 1423, a new spiral staircase built into the centre of the west wall replaced this arrangement. Also contained in the inner ward was a well and outbuildings that included a Great Hall and an adjoining Great Chamber. A strong wall, with its entrance guarded by a barbican and drawbridge, defended the inner ward. In front of the wall was a broad ditch that could be flooded in times of peril by means of a cleverly contrived aqueduct.

Beyond these formidable defences was the outer ward (bailey), which was enclosed by a curtain wall replete with towers, turrets and fortified gates on its southern and western sides. In the 12th century a tower constructed over a strong, tunnel-vaulted passageway defended the West Gate, but sometime in the 14th century the gateway was sealed. Reopened in the early 15th century, the tower was enlarged and refortified with a portcullis, barbican and a tilting bridge that was later replaced by a drawbridge. After sustaining serious damage from James IV's heavy artillery in both 1497 and 1513, the castle's defences underwent significant modifications. Along the curtain walls, its D-shaped projecting towers were remodelled to present a V-shape to enemy ordnance and provision was made to accommodate a number of cannon.

The keep, Norham Castle, Northumberland. Frequently threatened, attacked, besieged and bombarded, Norham Castle was destined to play a major role in four centuries of Border warfare. Still affording panoramic views across the Tweed and containing all the classic elements of a Norman castle, Norham retains its deserved reputation as the 'Queen of Border Castles'.



In the 1541 *Survey of Border Strongholds* the castle of 'Norrham ... belonginge to the byhoppe of Duresme [Durham]' was described as being 'in very good state both in reparacons & forteficac'ons well furnyshed & stuffed with artillery munyc'ons and other necessaries requysyte to the same'. Ten years later, Sir Robert Bowes, Warden of the English Middle March, reported to the Warden General that the castle still stood:

> Marvellously well for the defence and relief of the country, as well from incourses of enemys in time of war as from thefts and spoils in tyme

> of peace, for it standeth upon utter [extreme] frontier', and … a garrison of horsemen lying there, may be in the way of any enemies that shall pass [back] into Scotland between Barwick and Wark.

Procuring funds to maintain the fabric of the castle would seem to have been a constant struggle, and Bowes adds a warning note that, 'for want of continual reparation [parts of the castle] are in much decaye'. However, in spite of the penny-pinching government of Elizabeth I, the rugged old fortress continued to serve as a refuge until the Union of the Crowns, when it finally became redundant.

The outbreak of open warfare between England and Scotland that followed Edward I's invasion of 1296 saw the emergence of a great many castles, fortified houses and towers across the Borderland. A new trend in castle design placed the emphasis on strengthening the gatehouse, which in effect thrust the keep into the castle's front-line defences. This arrangement, which incorporated the feudal lord's living quarters above the hub of the castle's defensive apparatus, also gave him the advantage of exercising direct control over the main entrance to his fortress. In Northumberland, there are gatehouse-keeps at Tynemouth, Bothal and Bywell but the example par excellence is Dunstanburgh Castle, built as a retreat by Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, who held the nearby barony of Embleton.

Dunstanburgh Castle

With the exception of the king himself, Thomas of Lancaster was probably the wealthiest and most influential man in the realm. The powerful earl was openly scornful of Edward II's relationship with the effete Piers Gaveston, whose influence over the King infuriated the barons. Not surprisingly, as Edward II's deficiencies as a monarch became increasingly apparent, it was to Lancaster that the dissatisfied nobility rallied. Events came to a head when the Earl's supporters had Gaveston arrested and judicially executed in 1312. A year later, in order to avert a civil war, Edward grudgingly pardoned Thomas of Lancaster and his followers, but he never forgave them for Gaveston's death.



Carlisle Castle, Cumbria. This formidable fortress was regarded as the key to the west door of England and served as the residence of the Wardens of the English West March. Forever at the forefront of Anglo-Scottish warfare, the castle's defences have been much altered over the centuries. In the mid-16th century, the castle was adapted for artillery, with the addition of a half-moon battery in front of the Captain's Tower and an artillery parapet on the keep. In 1596, the notorious reiver Kinmont Willie Armstrong was broken out of the castle by Sir Walter Scott, the Bold Buccleuch, much to the embarrassment of the resident Warden, Lord Scrope.

The stronghold Thomas of Lancaster built is dramatically situated high on a rocky coastal promontory and dominates the surrounding landscape. Although it does not control any important road or river crossing, it is clear that Dunstanburgh was built as an imposing symbol of Lancaster's power and influence in the north of England. Using the finest of materials and designed on the grandest scale, the castle's defences enclose a sprawling site of 4.5 hectares (the largest in Northumberland), which to the north terminates in a sheer cliff that plunges 30.5m to the sea below. To the east, the promontory slopes down to a rocky shoreline and to the west, it falls steeply away to marshy ground, making the only level approach to the castle from the south.

Work on the castle started in 1313 and, following the English defeat at Bannockburn, the Scots launched a series of large-scale raids into Northumberland. The King had little option but to hand over control of his forces in the northern shires to Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, and in 1316, the Earl obtained a royal licence to crenellate at Dunstanburgh.

The magnificent gatehouse consisted of two massive, D-shaped towers that guarded the castle's main entrance, which was positioned between them and directly above the gate-passage, a central chamber contained apparatus for operating the portcullis. The north-eastern and north-western corners of the gatehouse were each capped with a tower and on either side of the south-facing parapet the great, curving walls were raised an additional two storeys in the form of D-shaped towers. From their inner sides a further pair of narrow stair turrets soared skywards, terminating at a dizzying height of 24.4m. Used as watchtowers, or signalling platforms, these turrets afforded unparalleled views in every direction. Deliberately designed to impress, they were without doubt the crowning touch to Dunstanburgh's magnificent gatehouse, the whole of which must have presented a truly daunting prospect to visitors and would-be attackers alike.

From the gatehouse, the south curtain wall ran east towards the shoreline. This section of the castle's defences was most likely to bear the brunt of any assault and in addition to a moat the wall was defended by a turret and two towers, all linked by an embattled wall walk. The Constable's Tower contained comfortable living quarters as befitted the castle's senior officer, and a smaller turret, being centrally placed, was designed to provide flanking fire along the length of the south curtain wall, which terminated at the Egyncleugh Tower. Perched high above a sea-filled ravine, this tower had a gateway and barbican in its south-facing wall and from here, a drawbridge spanning the moat allowed the castle's garrison access to a small harbour that lay a short distance to the south.

The inlet where the harbour was situated extended to the north, where it joined the great moat that lay beneath the west curtain wall. From here, the moat stretched northwards to Embleton Bay, effectively cutting off the castle site from the surrounding countryside.

High above the moat, the west curtain wall, which incorporated a rectangular turret, ran south from the cliff face to the north, and joined the principal gatehouse. Around 1323–25, the Lilburn Tower, a three-storey rectangular tower replete with angle turrets, was built at the northern end of the west curtain wall. A short distance to the north, a timber and earth palisade ran down the steep incline to a gatehouse below. Overlooking the moat and the bay beyond, this small tower stood guard over a track that approached the castle from the north.



Completed around 1316, Dustanburgh Castle is dramatically situated on a rugged headland on the Northumbrian coast. Now an imposing ruin, its magnificent gatehouse and defensive towers remain in unadulterated form and still convey a vivid impression of prestige and military might, as doubtless intended by its builder, Thomas, Earl of Lancaster.

Due to the precipitous nature of the northern perimeter of the outer bailey, defences here were minimal. A low wall ran along the edge of the cliff and met the east wall, which continued south along the shoreline to the Egyncleugh Tower. In times of trouble, villagers would have been accommodated in the vast outer bailey along with their livestock and whatever belongings they could carry with them.

In spite of the ever-present threat of invasion by the Scots, Thomas of Lancaster continued to openly oppose Edward II and less than ten years after work on Dunstanburgh had commenced the Earl was dead, executed by a vengeful King following his rebellion and subsequent defeat at Boroughbridge in 1322.

The Earl's estates were forfeited to the Crown and in 1368 the barony of Embleton passed into the hands of John of Gaunt, third son of Edward III and, by way of marriage, Duke of Lancaster and lord of Dunstanburgh. Dissatisfied with the layout of the castle's defences, the Duke ordered a new gatehouse to be

A DUNSTANBURGH CASTLE, 1385

The principle of the gatehouse-keep had one major disadvantage in that it became the immediate focus of an attack and whilst in the thick of battle, must also serve as the residence of the defender and his family. As an experienced soldier, this weakness was unacceptable to John of Gaunt and between 1380 and 1383 he commissioned important changes to the castle's defences. Immediately behind the gatehouse an inner ward was created, complete with six domestic residential buildings and a tower that governed access from the outer ward. When this work was completed around 1383, the main entrance between the D-shaped towers was walled up and a substantial new gatehouse, which allowed access to the inner ward, was constructed near the south end of the west curtain wall. This arrangement effectively converted the old gatehouse into a keep, allowing it to serve as a self-contained residence for the lord of the castle and as a final place of refuge if all other defences should fall.

The new gatehouse consisted of a vaulted tower that was equipped with a portcullis, and immediately in front of it stood a barbican. Running south from the barbican and closely parallel with the west curtain wall was a mantlet-wall 54.9m long. Guarding the southern end of this wall was a small tower equipped with a sloping drawbridge, for the land immediately in front of the castle dropped away quite steeply, much more so than it does today. This cleverly contrived approach to the castle's entrance forced any aggressor into a narrow killing field between the two walls. Here, he would be subjected to a hail of missiles from the great west tower, the west curtain wall and the barbican, before he could even attempt to tackle the new gatehouse. From the west, a track leading from the village of Embleton crossed the moat via a narrow causeway. Further access was controlled from a small, fortified gatehouse, which doubtless employed a drawbridge and was flanked by a stout earth and timber palisade that followed the line of the moat.

Dunstanburgh Castle, 1385

A



built in the west curtain wall and by blocking up the original entrance to the castle, transformed the massive gatehouse into an imposing keep. In 1399, Henry of Lancaster took the throne and Dunstanburgh's status changed to that of a royal castle. During the Wars of the Roses, Dunstanburgh held out for the Lancastrian cause and, in 1462, Yorkist forces laid siege to the castle. The garrison was starved into submission and its commander, Sir Ralph Percy, surrendered the castle on honourable terms to Edward IV. From that time onwards, Dunstanburgh, being somewhat remote from the usual paths of invasion, saw no further military action and, as a consequence, little was spent on maintenance. In 1584, the report of the Commissioners of the Borders deemed repairs unnecessary, as the castle was 'so farr distant from the sayd border of Scotland' and in time, Dunstanburgh lapsed into a state of 'wonderful great decay'.

As English control of the frontier deteriorated during the reign of Edward II, some of the northern gentry, having built comfortable, lightly defended residences for themselves, were forced to re-fortify them in the face of ever-increasing raids from Scottish marauders. A perfect example of this kind of development can be seen at Aydon Castle, an early fortified manor house in the Tyne Valley, built near the end of the 13th century.

Aydon Castle

Situated about 3km from Corbridge, Aydon Castle stands high above the Cor Burn, by which it is protected on three sides, particularly so at the rear of the fortress where the manor house itself stands on the very edge of a bank that falls steeply to the Burn below. The original manor house, which was largely undefended, was built just before 1296 in a rare period of peace on the Borders. Once hostilities commenced, however, the owner, Robert de Reymes, obtained permission from Edward I to crenellate and fortify his home.

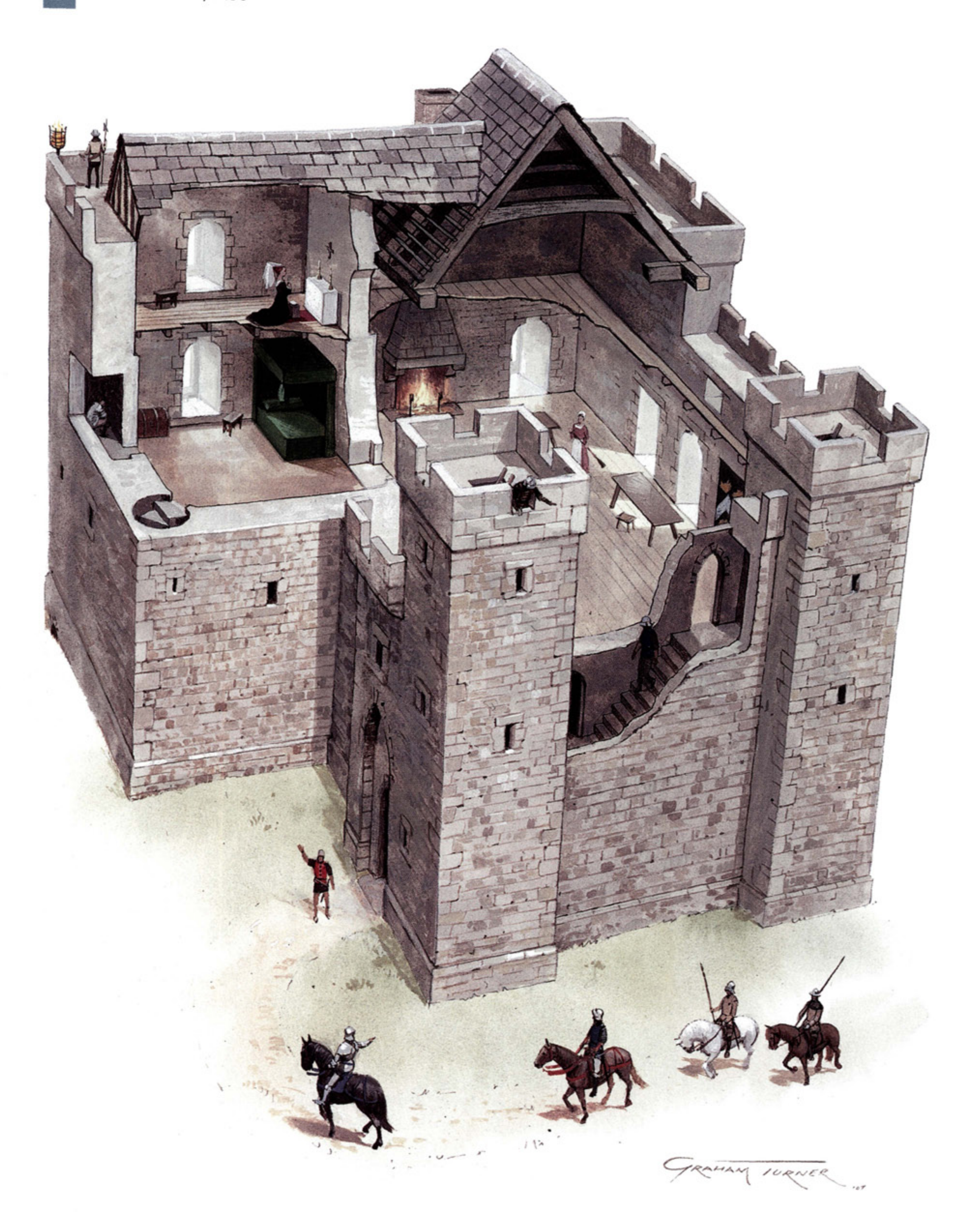
The manor house was a two-storey block, which was cruciform in plan and consisted of a spacious, well-appointed hall and solar with an attached wing that housed a kitchen. In 1305, the angle between the two blocks was enclosed by an embattled wall, which created an inner courtyard. In the

B THIRLWALL CASTLE, 1450

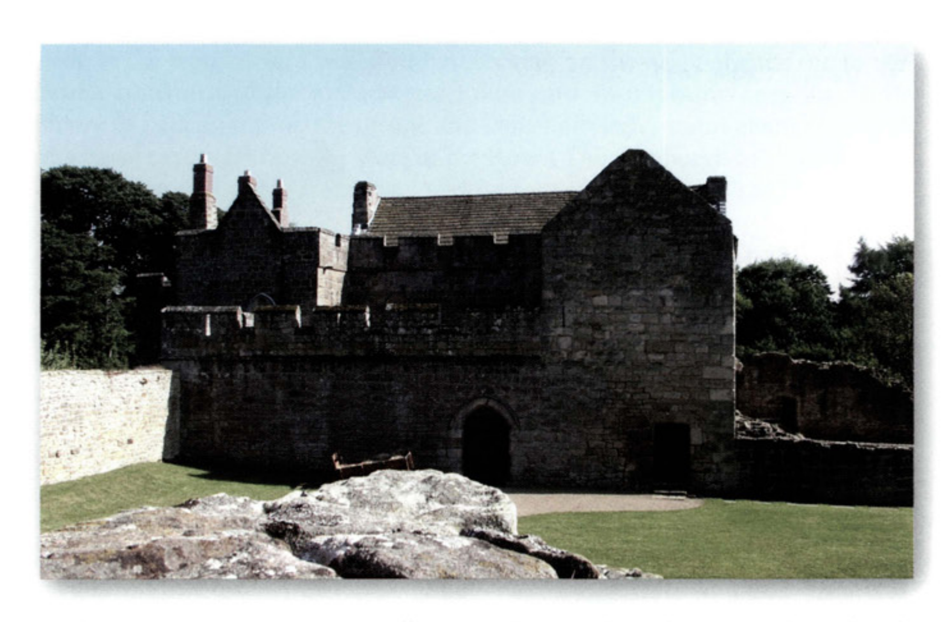
Built in the early part of 14th century with dressed stones plundered from nearby Hadrian's Wall, Thirwall Castle was strategically situated close to the Tyne–Irthing Gap, one of the main 'ingates' frequented by Scottish raiders. Built on an L-plan with immensely strong walls up to 2.7m thick, Thirlwall was a small castle of the hall-house type and comprises a three-storey, rectangular block with turrets at its north corners and a four-storey projecting tower on its east side. The building has few windows, those that are in evidence being small and narrow. The entrance was at the north end of the east wall and was protected by a strong door and a yett. A newel stair gave access to the first floor and from here, a straight mural stair in the north wall led to the second storey. The basement was dimly lit by narrow ventilation slits and beneath the north-west tower was a dungeon. There was no vaulted basement, the timber floors within being carried on setbacks and corbels. The hall would have been on the second floor with the solar at its south end and a room above on the third floor may have served as a chapel. In the south-east corner of the wing, the second and third floors were equipped with garderobes.

The 'castrum de thirwall' was a crucial link in a chain of defences that gave warning of Scottish incursions and would undoubtedly have been provisioned with a beacon. The watch was to be kept nightly 'by the inhabitants of Thirlwall ... Robert Thirlwall and Robert Carrock [being] setters, searchers and observers of this watch'. Even so, in 1589/90 Richard Thirlwall was forced to lodge a complaint against 'Wille's Arche Elliot of Stychill Hill, Robine Elliot of Bonhomes, his son Dande, and others who had stolen from Thirwall six oxen, six kye, and six young two year old nowte [cattle]'. Not surprisingly, the men of Thirlwall, whilst defending the surrounding area from Scottish marauders, engaged in similar activities themselves and in 1550, along with some of their notorious neighbours in Tynedale, they were accused of being 'much prone and inclined to theft, especially a lordship ... called Thirlwall'. The castle was abandoned as a place of residence in the mid-17th century. This illustration is based on a drawing by Peter Ryder.

B Thirlwall Castle, 1450



Aydon Castle, Tyne Valley, Northumberland. This late 13th-century, fortified manor house is without doubt the finest of its kind in the Border country. Robert de Reymes, a Suffolk gentleman, acquired Aydon in 1296 and at the commencement of hostilities with Scotland he obtained a licence to crenellate and fortify his property. Sadly, his new defences proved woefully inadequate, for in 1315, the Scots stormed the castle and burnt it; in 1317 it was taken again, this time by English rebels. The cost of the damage at Aydon left Robert de Reymes a broken and impoverished man.



mid-14th century, a curtain wall was built to enclose the exposed north side of the site. The wall was defended by a substantial ditch and incorporated a simple arched gateway, a D-shaped tower and a flanking square tower, the whole forming a roughly pentagonal outer bailey. Within this area, another wall linking the north end of the west block to the curtain wall, created an additional courtyard. However impressive these new defensive measures appeared to the de Reymes family, marauding Scots and English rebels were undeterred and Aydon was ransacked on a number of occasions.

BORDER FORTIFICATIONS

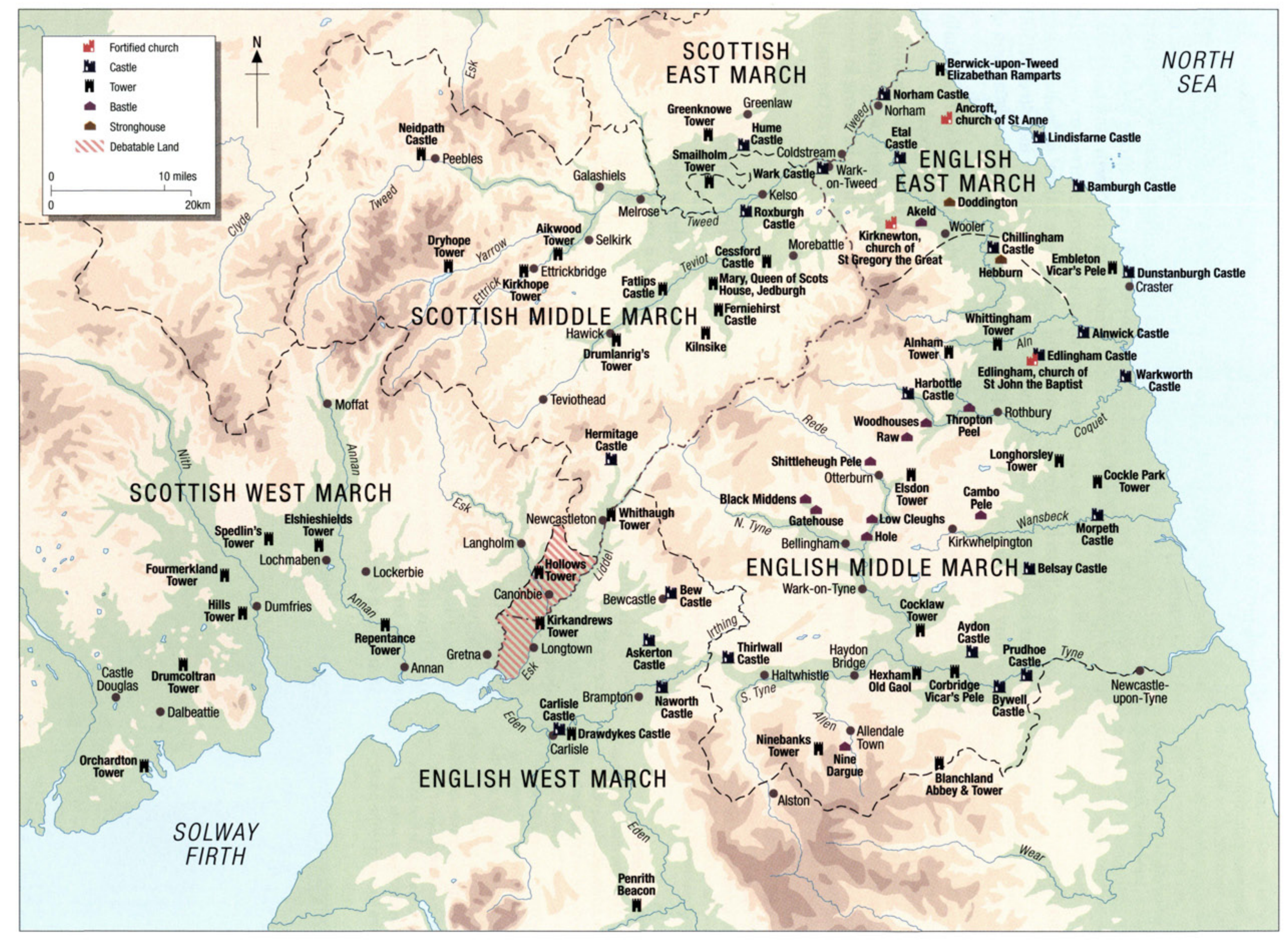
Whilst the great castles, such as Bamburgh, Warkworth, Alnwick and Dunstanburgh served as strategic power bases for the aristocracy of the north, the primary role of the tower house was to provide secure living accommodation for the Borderer, his family and within the confines of a barmkin wall, his extended family and close retainers.

A broad range of tower houses began to appear, many of them being situated within 30km of the Borderline. Their origins lay in crude timber and turf strongholds that were usually enclosed by a palisade of wooden stakes, or 'pales', from whence the term 'peles'.

The pele

In a survey carried out in 1541, it was noted that certain men of Tynedale lived in 'peles' that were located within inaccessible areas cut by 'ravins' and protected by fallen trees:

> In which naturall strength and fortyficac'ons of such places almost inaccessible the said Tynedalles do muche rejoice and imbolden themselves and when they be affrayed do rether trust in the strength of suche places without their houses than to the suertye or defence of their houses. And yet surely the heddesmen of them have very stronge houses whereof for the most p'te the utter sydes or walles be made greatt sware [square] oke trees strongly bounde and joyned together with greatt tenons and the same so thycke mortressed that yt wylbe very harde



Fortified church
Castle
Tower
Bastle
Stronghouse
Debatable Land
0
10 miles
0
20km
N
SCOTTISH EAST MARCH
ENGLISH EAST MARCH
SCOTTISH MIDDLE MARCH
SCOTTISH WEST MARCH
ENGLISH MIDDLE MARCH
ENGLISH WEST MARCH
NORTH SEA
SOLWAY FIRTH
Berwick-upon-Tweed Elizabethan Ramparts
Norham Castle
Norham
Ancroft, church of St Anne
Lindisfarne Castle
Etal Castle
Bamburgh Castle
Doddington
Akeld
Wooler
Kirknewton, church of St Gregory the Great
Chillingham Castle
Hebburn
Embleton Vicar's Pele
Dunstanburgh Castle
Craster
Greenknowe Tower
Greenlaw
Hume Castle
Smailholm Tower
Coldstream
Wark Castle
Wark-on-Tweed
Kelso
Roxburgh Castle
Morebattle
Cessford Castle
Mary, Queen of Scots House, Jedburgh
Ferniehirst Castle
Fatlips Castle
Kilnsike
Neidpath Castle
Peebles
Galashiels
Melrose
Aikwood Tower
Selkirk
Dryhope Tower
Ettrickbridge
Kirkhope Tower
Hawick
Drumlanrig's Tower
Teviothead
Hermitage Castle
Moffat
Whittingham Tower
Alnwick Castle
Alnham Tower
Edlingham Castle
Edlingham, church of St John the Baptist
Warkworth Castle
Harbottle Castle
Rothbury
Woodhouses
Thropton Peel
Raw
Shittleheugh Pele
Otterburn
Elsdon Tower
Longhorsley Tower
Cockle Park Tower
Cambo Pele
Black Middens
Gatehouse
Low Cleughs
Hole
Bellingham
Kirkwhelpington
Morpeth Castle
Belsay Castle
Wark-on-Tyne
Newcastleton
Whithaugh Tower
Langholm
Hollows Tower
Canonbie
Kirkandrews Tower
Longtown
Bewcastle
Bew Castle
Askerton Castle
Thirlwall Castle
Haltwhistle
Haydon Bridge
Hexham Old Gaol
Corbridge Vicar's Pele
Cocklaw Tower
Aydon Castle
Prudhoe Castle
Bywell Castle
Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Spedlin's Tower
Elshieshields Tower
Lochmaben
Lockerbie
Fourmerkland Tower
Hills Tower
Dumfries
Repentance Tower
Gretna
Annan
Castle Douglas
Drumcoltran Tower
Dalbeattie
Orchardton Tower
Brampton
Naworth Castle
Carlisle Castle
Drawdykes Castle
Carlisle
Allendale Town
Ninebanks Tower
Nine Dargue
Blanchland Abbey & Tower
Alston
Penrith Beacon
Tweed
Esk
Clyde
Yarrow
Ettrick
Teviot
Aln
Coquet
Rede
Wansbeck
N. Tyne
S. Tyne
Tyne
Nith
Annan
Liddel
Irthing
Eden
Allen
Wear

withoute greatt force and laboure to breake or caste downe any of the said houses, the tymber as well of the said walles as rooffes be so greatt and cov'ed mott parte with turves and earthe that they wyll not easyly burne or be sett on fyere.

In a letter of 2 April 1528, Lord Dacre describes a 'strong pele of Ill Will Armistraunges builded aftur sich a maner that it couth not be brynt ne distroyed, unto it was cut downe with axes'. Although no tangible evidence of these stout little 'peles' has survived, they do seem to bear a strong resemblance to the pioneer cabins that proliferated across parts of North America in the 18th century and are in all probability what was being referred to when large numbers of 'bastels', 'stronge houses' and 'peles' were 'taken' or 'pulled down' in cross-border forays. Indeed at one point, Dacre specifically indented for 300 sixpenny axes 'for wrecking', his purpose undoubtedly being the destruction of this class of defensible building.

Even when these turf and timber dwellings and their palisades were gradually being replaced in stone, the evocative term 'pele', or 'peel', lingered on and was still being used well into the 16th century to describe a variety of tower houses, bastles and stronghouses. Not surprisingly, academics are somewhat irritated by this rather haphazard nomenclature, but it should perhaps be borne in mind that the men who actually observed and described these buildings at the time felt the terms that they employed were appropriate enough.

The tower house

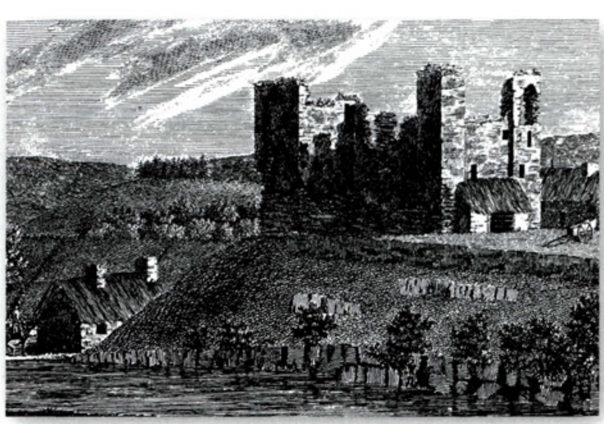
As a rule, tower houses were sited for their owners' convenience and are rarely found in what could be perceived as strategic locations; in other words, they were never built to deliberately stand as obstacles in the path of invading armies. Although defensibility was obviously a prime consideration, the relatively small size of these buildings meant that although they served to keep the owner and his family safe from the small bands of fast-moving marauders who 'rode with the moonlight', they could never withstand a determined assault by a large force and could not be expected to endure a prolonged siege. They were, however, built to cope with the daily cut and thrust of life in the Border Marches.

Because the remains of many tower houses in the Borders now stand alone, it is easy to forget that in their heyday, they were actually the nucleus of a thriving community. Most sites have scant evidence of the outbuildings, stables, storehouses and agricultural activity that sustained the owner, his immediate family, followers, servants and tenants.

BELOW LEFT
Thirlwall Castle, Greenhead, Northumberland. This small castle, which is situated close to Hadrian's Wall, stands on high ground above the Tipalt Burn and served as a secure family stronghold and manorial seat for the Thirlwalls, who were powerful members of the northern aristocracy. Thirlwalls had fought at Falkirk and with the Black Prince in France. and by 1384, John Thirlwall, in addition to being lord of Thirwall Castle, had been appointed as lieutenant to the Earl of Northumberland and warden of Carlisle Castle.

BELOW RIGHT
In 1776, the historian William Hutchinson, whilst on an expedition to Hadrian's Wall, described Thirlwall Castle as a 'horrid gloomy dungeon'. His sketch clearly shows the south-eastern tower and the two corner turrets on the north side still in a reasonable state of preservation. Note the structures attached to the east and west walls and the farmyard to the north.







The Gatehouse, Willimoteswick, near Beltingham, South Tyne Valley, Northumberland. In 1541, 'Willymonteswyke' was described as 'a good toure and stone house joyninge thereto ... kepte in good rep'ac'ons'. This fortified manor was home to the Ridleys, who were supervisors of the nightly watch that guarded 'the ford of Hautwessel' (Haltwhistle). In the Border Ballad 'The Fray of Hautwessel', the Ridleys violently repelled a raid by a war band of Armstrongs from Liddesdale. In the ensuing fray, 'John Ridley thrust his spear Right through Sim o' the Cathills wame [belly] ... Then Alec Ridley let flee A clothyard shaft; it struck Wat Armstrong in the ee' Went through his steel cap, heid an a' ... it made him quickly fa', He could na rise ... The best at thief-craft or the ba' [football] He ne'er again shall ride a raid'. A vivid reminder of the power of the English longbow!

The basic tower house was of a roughly rectangular shape and generally comprised a barrel-vaulted basement, supporting three or four storeys, stacked one above the other. Although towers obviously varied somewhat in size, a good many of them measured around 9.1 by 12.2m, rising to 12.2–18.3m in height over walls between 1.5–3m thick, making the tower house immensely strong in relation to its relatively small size. The buildings in its immediate vicinity were invariably enclosed by a protective barmkin wall, which may have been equipped with a parapet walk and a small gatehouse to guard the entrance, the whole arrangement combining in compact form the main benefits of a keep and bailey. Within this enclosure would be a comfortable hall, which provided additional accommodation, along with a kitchen, a storehouse for food and, if space permitted, perhaps a brew-house. Beyond the barmkin would have stood the more basic dwellings of lesser individuals and servants. Farming and animal husbandry were the principal source of livelihood and alongside tilled fields and rough pastureland would have been a stable for horses and enclosures for cattle and sheep.

Over time, the basic rectangular shape of the tower house changed to meet the needs of the owner, the most common variant being the L-plan tower, which was created by incorporating a new wing built at a right angle to the existing tower. Generally built to fulfil the need for extra accommodation or to house a stair, the L-plan was particularly popular on the Scottish side of the Border. A further development, albeit much rarer in the Border country, was the Z-plan tower, which comprised a substantial central tower with two smaller residential towers attached to diagonally opposed corners of the main building. In addition to providing extra accommodation, this arrangement also afforded the walls with good, all-round covering fire.

Construction

The majority of tower houses – and their barmkin walls – were constructed with stone that was quarried locally, and invariably took the shape of random rubble. Suitably sized lumps of rock would be split in two by an experienced builder and the resulting flat face of each rock would be used to fashion the

outer faces of the wall, whilst any chinks and gaps between the rocks were packed with chippings. The space between the inner and outer skins of the wall was filled with a thick rubble core and the whole structure was bound together with lime mortar, making an incredibly robust edifice.

This method of building was a much cheaper option than building in ashlar and did not require the expensive services of a stonemason, whose skills would only be called upon to cut the necessary dressings for doorways, stairways, windows, fireplaces, gun loops, mouldings, quoins and the like. To construct a tower in ashlar would have been time consuming and prohibitively expensive; indeed some towers were given rounded corners to reduce the need for dressed masonry.

However, there were disadvantages to building with random rubble, especially when using sandstone as it can be prone to water penetration. Wall-heads could be sealed off with capstones to avoid water ingress from above and some towers featured a sloping plinth around their base, which allowed rainwater to run off well away from the foundations. The commonest and perhaps most effective way of dealing with this problem was a process known as harling, in which a mixture of lime mortar and aggregate was thrown onto the walls, creating a semi-porous coating that would absorb the rainwater and, hopefully, allow it to dry out before it could penetrate the stonework beneath. The colour of the mixture invariably reflected the hue of the local stone used in the building and, in addition to smoothing out the rough surface of the walls, harling undoubtedly enhanced the appearance of a tower house by allowing the dressings around windows, doors and quoins to stand out in pleasing contrast to the walls.

Although some larger tower houses had their entrances at first-floor level and were accessed by a fore-stair, the main entrance of smaller towers was invariably at ground level.

Two doors usually defended entrances, with the jambs being rebated to accommodate a stout wooden door and an inner grille of iron. Wooden doors usually took the form of an outer layer of vertical planks and an inner layer that ran horizontally, the two being securely fastened together with long clencher nails. The door was further strengthened by a thick plank, or stile, that was dovetailed into the top, middle and bottom horizontal planks. Directly behind the wooden door, and carried on substantial hinges, was the grated iron door, or 'yett', as it was known. Constructed by forging iron bars together around a central point in the form of a latticework, they were extremely strong and virtually fireproof. Yetts were fitted with a heavy iron bolt that could be secured by means of a lock or chain and were further reinforced by means of an iron drawbar, which was housed in a tunnel in the adjacent wall. These deep, wood-lined tunnels, along with the drawbars themselves, would be installed whilst the building was being constructed.

The vast majority of tower houses had barrel-vaulted basements, which not only provided additional stability at ground level for the storeys above, but also had the advantage of being almost impervious to fire. Whilst some basement floors were flagged or cobbled, the majority were simply left as rough earth or bedrock, depending on the foundation. Security was paramount at this level and apertures were generally confined to narrow ventilation slits pierced high above ground level. In order to alleviate the gloom, some vaulted basements were fitted with one or two small, barred windows, which are usually found high in the end walls. The vaulted basement in more substantial tower houses occasionally accommodated a kitchen and by subdividing a high vault and

installing a second floor, or entresol, additional space was created for storage. In some cases, a convenient access hatch through the ceiling of the vault allowed the passage of provisions directly from the entresol to the hall above.

As in all defensible buildings, the size of a window was largely determined by its height above ground level and any windows immediately above the basement remained small, the sills and frames being fitted with socket holes for iron bars. Even at safer levels, where windows were allowed to increase in size, they remained well defended by strong iron grilles, crafted on similar lines to a yett. Windows were generally fitted with wooden shutters, which could be opened to admit light and fresh air, and for those that could afford it, the upper half of the opening could be glazed, the lower half being closed by shutters. The recesses of larger windows were usually splayed out to allow the maximum amount of light to penetrate and their side walls were often fitted with stone seats.

Access to the upper floors was usually by means of a narrow turnpike, or newel stair, where the steps branch out from the central newel and ascend in a clockwise direction. It was believed that this arrangement also ensured that should the doorway be breached and swordplay ensue, the advantage of manoeuvrability would always remain with a right-handed defender who was retreating upwards. This may well be so, for the Kerrs, who were famously left handed, had the stairs in their towers built to rise in an anticlockwise direction. Some examples also featured a 'trip-step', which was steeper than its fellows and designed to catch the unwary attacker off guard. Usually built within the thickness of the wall, or tucked into a convenient corner, the newel stair was relatively simple to build and took up little space. Occasionally, to allow more space, the stair was housed in its own separate stair-tower and in some L-shaped towers, where the entrance was situated in the re-entrant angle, the main stair terminated at first floor level and the upper storeys were reached by a narrow stair turret, built out above the doorway and supported by corbels, as can be seen at Greenknowe Tower, Gordon. Occasionally, as found in the Vicar's Pele, Corbridge, a straight flight of stairs led directly to the first floor.

On the first floor was the great hall, the hub of the tower house, a well-appointed, spacious room where the owner, his family and trusted retainers would convene to socialize and take their meals. The great hall was the showpiece of the tower house and invariably contained the grandest fireplace in the building. Some were decorated with friezes or carvings and, in finer examples, with heraldic devices, which would have been brightly painted. Many of these fireplaces feature a huge lintel, usually fashioned from an enormous, single piece of stone, the weight of the wall

Hollows Tower, Canonbie, Dumfries and Galloway. The site is associated with the celebrated reiver Johnnie Armstong of Gilnockie,and it was here, in 1525, that he raised 'Holehouse' on land he had been granted by Lord Maxwell. Although the house was in all probability of timber construction, Lord Dacre, Warden of the English West March, claiming that it was built upon 'a parcell of the Debatable grounde', on which it was forbidden to erect a permanent dwelling, crossed the Border in 1528 and burned it down. The following year, amidst treacherous circumstances, the Scottish king, James V, executed Johnnie Armstrong. The present tower was built almost 20 years later and, after the Debateable Land had been divided to the relative satisfaction of both nations in 1552, the Armstong tower was finally allowed to reside in Scotland.



above being supported by a broad, substantial, relieving arch. Throughout the tower, walls were usually plastered and then painted, or covered with wood cladding, and in the great hall no doubt decorated with tapestries. The great hall would usually be equipped with a number of aumbries, or wall-cupboards, some of which may have been secured with wooden doors and quite often there would also be a salt box situated close to the warmth of the fireplace. Generously proportioned windows ensured the maximum amount of light and ventilation and, invariably, there was a convenient garderobe nearby, most of which were provided with a door, a lantern recess and a small window.

Ideally, garderobes were positioned one above the other, or laid out in a roughly similar arrangement through the upper floors. If possible, they shared the same flue, which generally discharged outside the enclosure, or into a stone drain below ground level, not unlike a modern cesspit.

The upper storeys had timber floors supported on joists that were built into the walls, often with additional support being provided by stone corbels. The second storey was generally reserved for the sole use of the lord and his lady and contained their private apartments, their sleeping quarters and their own garderobe. This floor would be fitted out in much the same manner as the great hall, albeit on a more intimate scale and, being high above ground level, would have also enjoyed the benefits of larger windows. In some instances, walls of wattle and clay may well have partitioned this room in order to create one or two smaller chambers.

Further storeys would have provided accommodation and sleeping quarters for the lord's immediate family, the top storey usually giving access to the parapet. On some towers the parapet was corbelled out, crenellated and fitted with machicolations, whereby defenders could rain missiles down upon attackers who had managed to reach the walls. Some parapet walks had projecting bartizans at their corners, which, being corbelled out further than the parapet itself, allowed defenders greater manoeuvrability when engaging attackers in the immediate vicinity of the tower. Parapets were drained by means of stone waterspouts, which protruded from the base of the parapet and carried rainwater well clear of the walls. In some instances, when a stair opened directly onto the parapet, the stair head was sheltered by a cap-house, as seen at Orchardton Tower.

In Scotland, near the end of the 16th century, it became fashionable to fully cover the width of the tower with a pitched roof, which came right down to the wall-head. As a consequence, the parapet gradually became obsolete and bartizans gave way to one or two rounded corner turrets, usually with conical roofs. Whilst quaint in appearance, shrewd owners equipped them with well-sited shot holes and, in order to provide flanking fire, they are often found strategically placed at diagonally opposed corners of a tower house.

Roofs were steeply pitched and, as a rule, covered with stone slabs, which were attached to the timbers by means of wooden pegs or sheep bones, the weight being supported by stout rafters and purlins. The various timbers used in the construction of the roof structure were morticed together, secured with wooden pegs, and in some cases, marked with Roman numerals, presumably for ease of identification during the process of assembly.

Some roofs were pierced with dormer windows to allow light into the attic, a refinement invariably installed near the end of the 16th century. On the Scottish side of the Border, the copingstones on the gable end of the roof were often raised in a stepped fashion, creating 'corbie stanes', or crow stepping, an attractive feature that enclosed the roof and gave protection against strong winds.

Occasionally, 'corbie stanes' were widened to provide steps up to beacons, or lookout posts, for most towers were crucial links in a chain of stations that could swiftly spread news of invasion or raid. Some towers were equipped with braziers, whilst others were fitted with stone fire pans, as at Hollows Tower and Repentance Tower. Principal beacons, however, were generally situated on hilltops throughout both sides of the Border, although the Earl of Sussex instructed Wardens of the English East and Middle Marches to ensure that 'upon every fray raysed in the night' warning must be given to the country 'by fire in the topps of the castle or toure'.

Although most towers share some of the characteristics described above, each of them has its own unique features and peculiarities, be they intrinsic to the building itself, or enshrined in its history.

Hollows Tower

Sometimes called Gilnockie, this rugged tower house built in the mid-16th century is situated two miles from Canonbie and stands high above the river Esk, by which it is protected on two sides. 'Holehouse', or Hollows, is rectangular in plan and measures around 10 by 7.6m over sandstone rubble walls averaging 1.5m in thickness. At the level of the parapet walk, the walls stand 11.6m in height and 4.9m higher, the crow-stepped south gable is topped with a stone beacon that could be fired in the event of raid or invasion. The elaborate corbelling, which incorporates a bold cable moulding, once supported projecting turrets, or rounds, and a parapet that has long since disappeared.

The tower comprises four storeys over a barrel-vaulted basement with an attic in the roof space. At basement level, all the walls are well defended by splayed gun loops except on the eastern side, where there was probably a barmkin. The entrance, which is in the west wall, features a double rebate for a wooden door and inner yett, and inside the basement a newel stair rises in the south-western corner to the upper storeys. It terminates in the attic where a doorway allows access to the parapet. On the first floor, three windows, two of which have stone seats, light the hall and the room is graced with a fine fireplace 2.1m wide. The upper floors are similarly arranged on a more modest scale. The tower was sympathetically restored in 1979–80.

The Vicar's Pele, Corbridge

Built in the early part of the 14th century with Roman worked stones from the nearby garrison town of Corstopitum (Corbridge), the tower house measures 8.2 by 6.4m over walls 1.4m thick and rises to a height of 9.1m. Looking out over the market place and churchyard, the embattled parapet adds another 1.5m to the height of the tower and encloses a walkway, with square, corbelled-out



Standing within the churchyard of St Andrew's Church in the Northumbrian village of Corbridge, this small, well-preserved tower house from the early 14th century was intended as both a residence and sanctuary for the vicar. As tower houses go, this one could almost be described as dainty.

machicolated bartizans at each corner. The entrance to the tower, which is in the east wall, was defended by a stout oak door reinforced by an iron grille. From the barrel-vaulted basement, a straight mural stair rises to the first floor and at the stair head there is a mural slop sink with a drain pierced through the wall, which discharges into the market place below. The first-floor chamber, which served as the vicar's living quarters, is entered through an arched doorway and is lit by trefoil-headed windows with stone seats. The room is well appointed and boasts two aumbries and a generous fireplace. In the north-east corner there is a garderobe, and from this corner, a stair leads to the second storey, which is lit by three windows and served as both bedroom and study. The timber floor was carried on beams that were supported on corbels and in the north-west corner, adjacent to one of the windows, there is a stone book rest, slanted so as to catch the light. A ladder from this floor led through an opening to the battlements above.

Standing high above the Elsdon Burn in Redesdale, Northumberland, this imposing tower house was built to accommodate the parish priest. In a survey of 1542, it was reported that the 'naughty' people of Redesdale not only committed 'acts of rapine and spoil, but often went as guides to the thieves of Scotland, in expeditions to harry and burn'. It is hardly surprising that the vicar was in need of such a high degree of security whilst living amongst such 'eveil, unruly and misdemeaned' people.

Elsdon Tower

Standing in Elsdon, the former capital of Redesdale is another tower house that served as a vicar's 'pele', but one that was constructed on a much grander scale than the quaint example at Corbridge. In 1415, a 'Turris de Ellysden' was documented as a 'vicar's pele' and was probably built by the Umfraville family. The present tower, however, which is strongly situated above the Elsdon Burn, opposite the family's earlier motte and bailey earthwork, bears many of the hallmarks of 16th-century construction and may well be a rebuild of the fortress mentioned in 1415.



The original entrance to the tower was in the north wall and was defended by three machicolations positioned just below the parapet. The tower is 13 by 9.4m and originally comprised three storeys over a vaulted basement with walls 2.3m thick. The walls rise to a height of 12.8m terminating in a parapet, on which are armorial panels displaying the heraldic devices of various aristocratic Northumbrian families, including those of the Umfravilles. Both the parapet and its decorations, however, are from a later date than the original build. A newel stair, which connected the three upper floors, included a trip step designed to unbalance the unwary intruder. In the 17th century the upper floors were converted into two storeys with higher ceilings, and a steeply pitched roof was constructed within the battlements. In more enlightened times, the windows were enlarged and in order to make the building more comfortable the interior has been very much altered over the years. The tower continued to serve as a rectory until 1961.



Orchardton Tower, 15th century, Castle Douglas, Dumfries and Galloway. Built on a circular plan and tapering as it rises, at first glance this rather charming tower house bears an uncanny resemblance to a Scottish broch. Whilst Orchardton Tower is unique in the Border country, there are a number of round tower houses in Ireland, on which it may have been modelled.

Orchardton Tower

Being circular in plan, this picturesque tower is the only one of its kind in the Border country. Built for John Cairns around 1456 and standing a few miles south of Dalbeattie, the tower is 8.8m in diameter and comprises three storeys over a vaulted basement. The rubble-built walls, which are almost 2.7m thick at ground level, taper somewhat as they rise, are around 10m in height and terminate in a corbelled-out parapet, which encloses a narrow wall-walk. A barmkin wall originally enclosed the tower and a number of substantial two-storey outbuildings, one of which may have been a great hall.

An arched doorway admits to the gloomy, rectangular, vaulted basement, from which there was no access to the upper floors. The original entrance, which was defended by two drawbars, was at first-floor level and would have been reached from the courtyard by means of a timber forestair. The upper storeys are all circular, the first floor serving as the hall, which is lit by two windows and contains a fireplace, an aumbry and a recycled piscina, which served as a washing bowl. A newel stair rising within the thickness of the wall gives access to the floors above and near the stair foot there is a garderobe. The second floor is laid out in much the same comfortable manner, the third being less well appointed. The newel stair terminates in a neatly contrived cap-house, which opens onto the parapet wall-walk.

The Old Gaol, Hexham

In the English Middle March the inhabitants of Tynedale had a well-deserved reputation for lawlessness and in 1330, the Archbishop of York, with uncanny foresight, ordered a 'good and strong gaol' to be built for the detention of offenders.



The Old Gaol, Hexham, Northumberland. Countless miscreants from all levels of society, Scots and English alike languished within the Old Gaol's forbidding walls whilst awaiting their trial and judgement in the nearby Moot Hall. Even when imprisoned, offenders were a continued threat, for when 'the greatest and strongest riders or rather reavers, Scots and English were in gaol, great threats were sent to their apprehenders and prosecutors, and at the bar a notable Scots thief threatened blood [feud] against the gentleman who took him.'

Serving a dual purpose as both a fortified tower and a place of incarceration, it was in all probability the first purpose-built prison in England. The gaoler was John de Cawood, a barber and sergeant of the manor, who was paid 2d a day.

Completed in 1332, and built with stones looted from Corstopitum, the tower is rectangular, being 18m long by 11m wide over walls 2.3m thick at ground level, where the lower courses are protected by a chamfered plinth. The walls rise to a height of 16.5m and were defended by battlements that were corbelled out and equipped with machicolations. Comprising three floors, which were connected by a newel stair, the Gaol was equipped with 'shackles, manacles, fetters and other items necessary'. At ground level, there were two vaulted chambers that served as prisons. Here, the poorer kind of person was imprisoned, whilst awkward souls were simply cast into two foul, unlit dungeons beneath the floor. The first storey, being better lit and more salubrious, was reserved for richer prisoners who could pay their way and the gaoler lived above his charges on the floor above.

In 1550, however, the Gaol was reported to be in some decay and in 1595, Ralph Eure, Warden of the Middle March, complained bitterly that due to its ruinous condition, he was forced to hold some prisoners 'of the better sorte' in his own house for safekeeping! The building was last used as a prison in 1824 and now, rather appropriately, has been adapted to house the Border History Museum, which celebrates the turbulent history of the Old Gaol and the life and times of the Border Reivers.

In spite of its grim appearance the Old Gaol at Hexham was allowed to fall into decay, so much so that in 1538, a band of Scottish and English reivers from Liddesdale and Tynedale were able to break into the prison, beat up the guards and release their kinsmen, having only a single iron door to break down. (Illustration: Angus McBride, courtesy of Historic Hexham Trust)



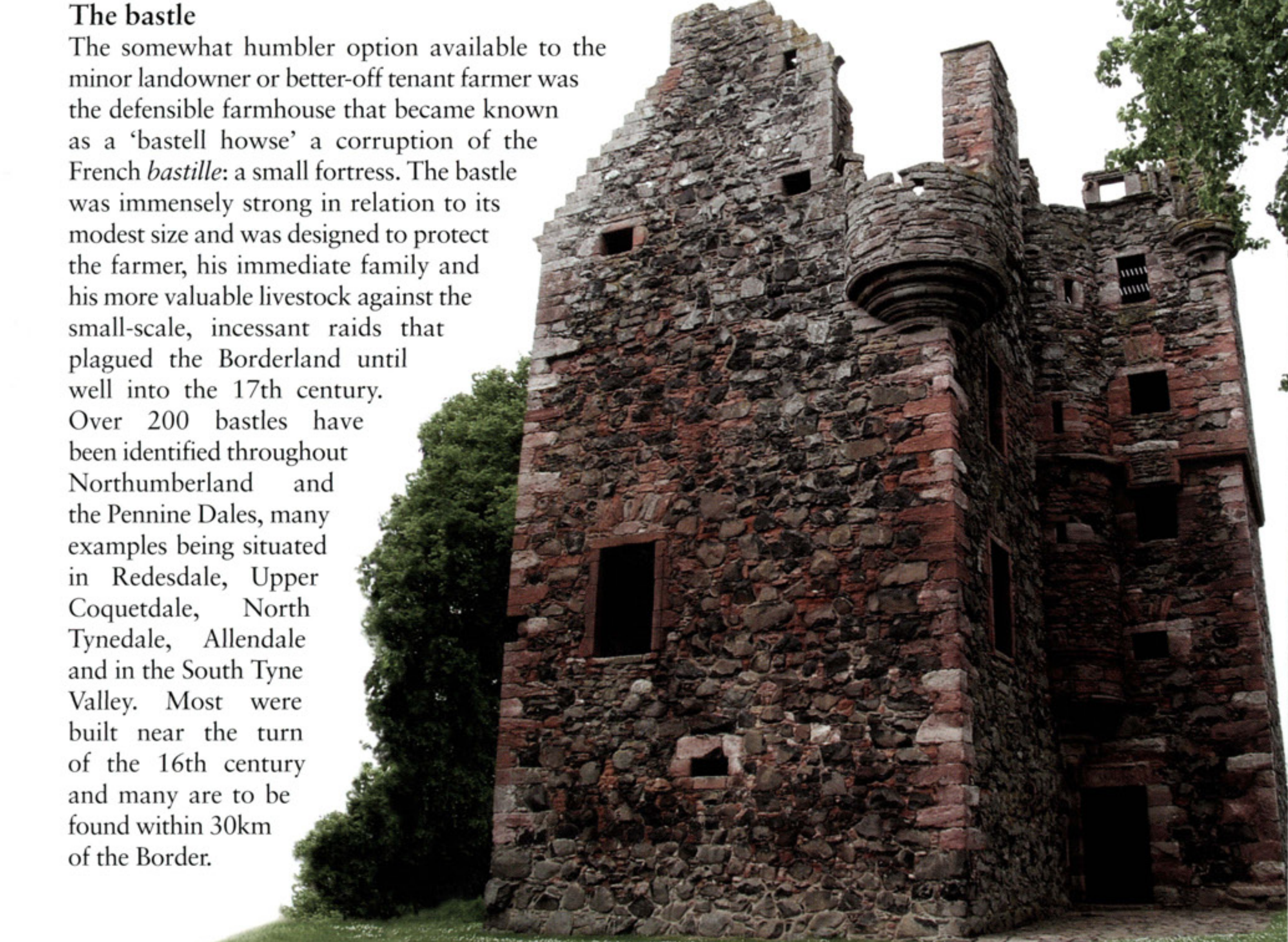
Greenknowe Tower
Situated near Gordon in Berwickshire and built on an L-plan in 1581, Greenknowe has four upper storeys including an attic in the roof space, all carried over a vaulted basement with walls 1.2m thick. The main block is 10.1 by 7.2m, the protruding shorter wing being 4.9 by 3.3m.

The entrance to the tower is close to the re-entrant angle, and down one or two stairs inside the vaulted basement is a kitchen equipped with a wide fireplace, along with further space for storage. A small hatch in the ceiling allowed provisions to be passed to the floor above. From the basement, a broad newel stair in the wing leads to the first floor, which served as the principal residential quarters and features a fine fireplace. From here, the upper storeys were reached by means of a smaller spiral stair turret, which was corbelled out in the angle above the entrance. This arrangement allowed greater space on the floors above, which consisted of well-appointed sleeping quarters and private chambers that were well provisioned with generously proportioned, half-glazed windows, protected with iron bars. The pitched roof had crow-stepped gables and sloped directly to the wall-head; consequently, there is no parapet-walk from which to defend the tower. Instead, there are two round, corbelled-out angle turrets equipped with shot holes, which are situated at diametrically opposite corners of the main block. The walls are equipped with a variety of gun loops; additional supporting fire came from a smaller turret built on a corner of the wing and from the narrow stair turret above the entrance. The tower served as a residence until the1830s, after which it fell into ruin.

Greenknowe Tower, Gordon. This classic, L- plan tower house is a fine example of a gradual shift towards domestic comfort as opposed to pure defensibility, which became fashionable across the Scottish borders in the late 16th century. It is, however, well provided with a variety of strategically placed gun loops.

The bastle

The somewhat humbler option available to the minor landowner or better-off tenant farmer was the defensible farmhouse that became known as a 'bastell howse' a corruption of the French *bastille*: a small fortress. The bastle was immensely strong in relation to its modest size and was designed to protect the farmer, his immediate family and his more valuable livestock against the small-scale, incessant raids that plagued the Borderland until well into the 17th century. Over 200 bastles have been identified throughout Northumberland and the Pennine Dales, many examples being situated in Redesdale, Upper Coquetdale, North Tynedale, Allendale and in the South Tyne Valley. Most were built near the turn of the 16th century and many are to be found within 30km of the Border.



Mary, Queen of Scots' House, Jedburgh. This T-plan tower house is romantically linked with Mary, Queen of Scots, who, whilst travelling through the Borders on official business, stayed in Jedburgh for four weeks in 1566. Although the town contained a number of defensible town houses in the 16th century, the association may well be justified as Mary did indeed lease a house in Jedburgh from the Kerrs of Ferniehirst, and the stairs in this tower all turn to the left, a characteristic of the famously left-handed Kerrs.



Bastles were invariably built as two-storey rectangular structures being around 9–10m by 5.5–6m with walls averaging between 1 and 1.2m thick. A narrow, ground-floor doorway, usually placed centrally in one of the gable ends, gave access to a basement, or byre, into which cattle, sheep or horses could be driven in times of trouble. Access to the upper storey, which served as a living area, was through a doorway usually set high up in one of the long walls and was reached via a ladder which could then be drawn up behind the occupant. Essentially, the bastle compressed the tower and barmkin into one compact structure.

Walls were constructed using irregularly shaped blocks of stone and are characterized by their use of massive quoins and at ground level by huge boulders that took the place of traditional, sunken foundations, which are rarely in evidence. The walls of a bastle were constructed in much the same way as a tower, although the mortar used was quite weak or clay based. The entrance to the basement was strongly constructed, utilizing large blocks of stone to form the jambs and lintel, the weight above being taken by a small relieving arch. Doorways were narrow, but usually splayed out internally and rebated for one or two substantial doors, which could be secured by drawbars, which rested in tunnels built into the wall. Doors would invariably be 'harr-hung', an arrangement by which the door was allowed to pivot on pins, or a firmly attached timber, that rested in sockets set into the sill and lintel. No matter how strong, raiders could potentially burn down these timber doors and one or two bastles are equipped with a 'quenching hole', which is set above the doorway and allowed the occupants to pour water over the flames.

Some basements were barrel vaulted, whilst others relied on substantial oak beams to carry the floor above. Basements were dimly lit by two, or perhaps three, narrow ventilation slits, rarely more than 0.15m wide. Once the more valuable animals were secured inside the basement, access to the

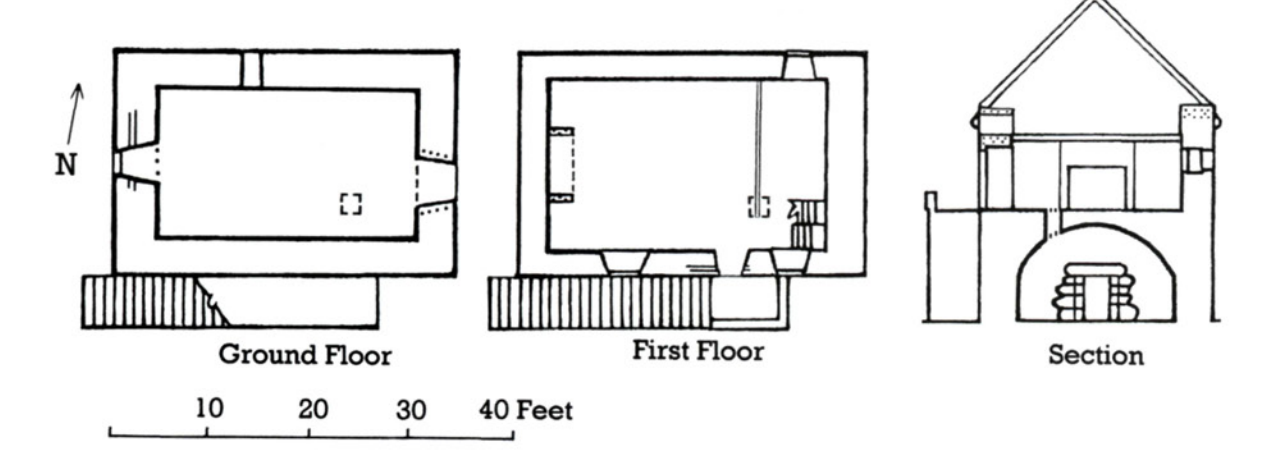


Hole Bastle, Bellingham, Redesdale, Northumberland. The bastle has been incorporated into a farm complex and an external stone stairway, installed in more enlightened times, now allows access to the upper doorway. The two smaller windows, situated just below the stone-flagged roof and now lighting an attic, were originally set at either side of the doorway and were each equipped with sockets for two iron bars.

upper floor was usually through a very small trapdoor that pierced the vaulted ceiling, or the stone-flagged floor above. This was achieved by way of a removable ladder, although some bastles, such as Woodhouses and Crag, were equipped with internal stone stairs that led from the basement to the living quarters above.

A removable wooden ladder also allowed external access to the first-floor doorway, which was constructed on similar lines to the one below and usually set slightly off-centre in one of the long walls. (In more settled times, access to the upper level was usually improved by the addition of an external stone stairs.) At this level, the walls were pierced with two or three small, rectangular windows, usually consisting of roughly cut surrounds fitted with sockets for iron bars. In some examples, windows can be found at each side of the doorway with perhaps another placed high up in the gable end.

Hole Bastle. Ground plan and elevations.







TOP LEFT
A view of the tunnel-vaulted basement at Hole Bastle. Note the narrow ventilation slit in the gable wall, and to the right the small ladder hole in the ceiling, which allowed access to the upper floor. This doorway has replaced the original entrance, which was in the opposite end of the vault and is now blocked up.

TOP RIGHT
The basement of Gatehouse Bastle showing the roughly fashioned timber beams that carry the upper storey. Although not as strong as a barrel vault, this arrangement would have been virtually fireproof. The basement floor is partially flagged with stone slabs and the south-west end wall is corbelled out to carry a fireplace in the living quarters above. (Courtesy of Miss Madison)

Such small openings would not have allowed much ingress of light and would need to have been supplemented by candles and whatever light emanated from the fireplace, which stood at one of the gable ends. In the absence of a barrel vault, the weight of the hearth was supported from below by a stretch of stone corbels. Generally, the fireplace was equipped with a timber and plaster firehood that was supported by a timber beam, and a flue that was recessed into the gable wall and terminated in a stone chimneystack, carried on corbels. Recesses in the walls provided rudimentary cupboards and are often found near the fireplace, whilst water was no doubt stored in a barrel.

The living area might have been divided by wattle and clay partitions to provide sleeping quarters and small areas may also have been screened off with curtains to allow a small degree of privacy. Ablutions must normally have been performed outdoors, whilst inside the bastle, sanitation was limited to the use of a bucket that would be emptied each morning. Additional sleeping accommodation, perhaps for children, may have been provided in the form of a loft, or gallery, in the roof space. Roofs were steeply pitched and usually flagged with stone slabs, which may have been secured to the hefty roof timbers with roots, or sheep shank bones. It would appear, however, that some bastles were thatched with heather, which seems almost perverse considering the trouble taken to make the rest of the structure virtually fireproof.

There are a variety of bastle types scattered across the region, many of them incorporating a number of the aforementioned features.

Woodhouses Bastle

Situated in Coquetdale, near Harbottle, this fine example of a Northumbrian bastle house can be dated to the turn of the 17th century. The building is 12.2 by 7.6m, the upper storey being carried over a vaulted basement. The walls, which are 1.5m thick, were built of random rubble and incorporate massive, squared quoins. In the south wall there are two original, narrow windows, both fitted with sockets for iron bars, and below one window there is a slop sink and drain. The doorway to the basement was well defended by two drawbars and above the lintel is a stone showing the date 1602, although





this may not be in its original position. In the south-east corner of the basement is a rare example of a stone stair leading to the living quarters above. In 1903, the antiquarian David Dippy Dixon mentions the remains of a 'winding staircase', although the present arrangement is an alteration from 1903. New windows and a door to the upper floor were inserted at a later date and in recent times the bastle has been sympathetically restored.

Low Cleughs Bastle, Redesdale

Standing on a windswept hillside overlooking the Rede Valley, this superior type of bastle dates from the end of the 16th century. It is built of roughly coursed sandstone blocks, the base course incorporating a number of massive boulders, and measures 13.3 by 7.45m with walls around 1.3m in thickness. The angle quoins and surrounds of both doorways are built with dressed stonework, as are the surrounds of the upper-storey windows. All three windows contain sockets for iron bars, two of them being equipped with additional sockets for harr-hung shutters.

Unusually, the doorways to the basement and upper floor are set one above the other in the long south wall. The lower door was defended by two drawbars, the upper door by only one. Timber beams carried the upper floor and corbelling in the south-west wall supported a hearth, above which would have been a firehood. The walls of the living area are equipped with a number of stone cupboards and the bastle may have had additional sleeping accommodation in the form of a gallery in the roof space. Nearby are the foundations of what may be a second bastle.

Stronghouses

Although the following two strongholds are both known as 'bastles', they actually fall into a class of buildings known as 'stronghouses'. This term is used to describe a type of defensible building that was designed on more sophisticated lines than a bastle and was certainly intended to provide more salubrious accommodation, but which cannot quite be included in the tower house family of buildings.

TOP LEFT
In 1541, this bastle at Akeld, near Wooler in Northumberland, was described as 'a lytle fortlett or bastle house without a barmekyn' and, being 19.2m in length, it is somewhat longer than other bastles. The basement was barrel vaulted, the roof being pierced with a ladder hole leading to the upper floor. This interior view of the ground floor entrance, which is in the long west wall, gives a good idea of the stout nature of the doorway, the jambs of which are fitted with a double check and a deep tunnel housing the drawbar. Only sheer brute force could hope to 'burst' through such defences, but on occasion that is exactly what was brought to bear.

TOP RIGHT
Gatehouse Bastle, Tarset, Northumberland. Whilst the windows of some bastles were no more than crude rectangular openings, the better sort of bastle occasionally boasted more sophisticated surrounds, such as this window to the right of the doorway at Gatehouse Bastle, which has a dished sill and blind arch carved into the lintel. Note the use of alternate long and short stones in the door surrounds. (Courtesy of Miss Madison)



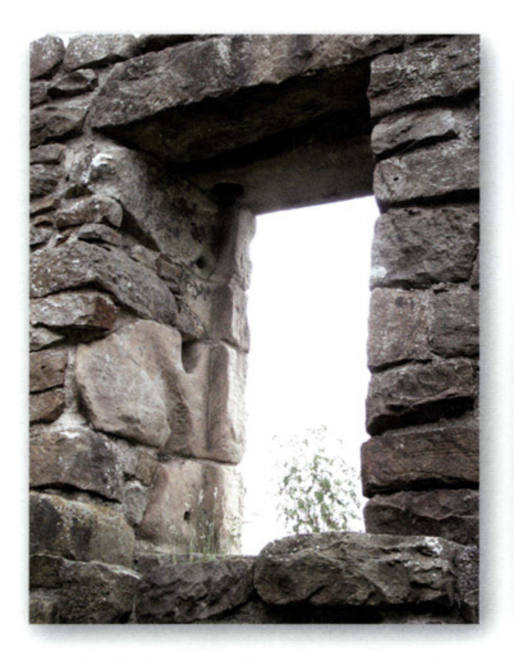


TOP LEFT
Woodhouses Bastle, late 16th century, Coquetdale, Northumberland. This rugged bastle stands tall enough to have incorporated a loft beneath its steeply pitched roof, as suggested by the small window high up in the east gable. The original doorway to the upper floor was most likely set in the long south wall and approached by means of a removable ladder.

TOP RIGHT
Doorway to the vaulted basement in the east end of Woodhouses Bastle showing a date stone that was probably inserted some time after the building was completed. Along with the inscribed date of 1602 are the initials W P and B P, standing for William and Bartholemew Potte. In a survey of Border Lands in 1604, Woodhouses consisted of 'four houses, two outhouses and eighty two acres of land, the whole of which was held by five persons', one of whom was the aforementioned William Potte.

Hebburn Bastle

Standing 0.8km east of Chillingham Castle, and built in the 15th century, this building is far more commodious and elaborately constructed than a bastle house, which it predates by almost two hundred years. Measuring 18.3 by 11m, the building was twin-gabled, the two upper storeys being carried over a vaulted basement with walls between 2.7 and 3m in thickness. Beneath the floor is an unpleasant pit, 2.4m deep, that doubtless served as a dungeon. The entrance is near the south-eastern corner and from here a newel stair rises to the upper storeys, the first floor being divided into three rooms, two of which were provisioned with fireplaces and generous windows. Above, the second floor comprised two rooms in the attic space created by the twin roofs that were lit by windows in the gable ends.





TOP LEFT
The upper door at Low Cleughs Bastle was 'harr-hung', the sill and lintel being provisioned with sockets in which a post attached to the door would pivot. In this view of the doorway, the socket in the lintel can be clearly seen. Note the drawbar tunnel in the jamb.

TOP RIGHT
Doddington Bastle, built 1584, Northumberland. In the 16th century the village of Doddington, which was part of the estate of Sir Thomas Grey of Chillingham, hosted a weekly cattle market, was home to 30 taxpayers and accommodated two mills. Not surprisingly, this haven of prosperity drew raiders from near and far and in order to deter them, the Greys built a stronghouse in the centre of the village. The building is now in a ruinous state, although the projecting stair turret still stands to its full height.

On high ground to the east are the remains of Ros Castle, an Iron Age hill fort, which became one of the most important beacons in the English Marches; it is surely no coincidence that the Hebburn coat of arms contains three sable cressets, or beacons (see the bottom image on page 8).

Doddington Bastle
Built for Sir Thomas Grey of Chillingham in 1584 this stronghouse, which was constructed on a T-plan, measures 17.2 by 7.9m and comprised three storeys, all carried on timber beams. The basement may well have served as a kitchen and in the centre of the south wall a projecting porch and stair turret gave access to all floors and to embattled parapets that ran along the north and south walls. The walls, which were only 1.1m thick, were not particularly strong for a building of this size and it was found necessary to strengthen them with buttresses. Near the end of the 19th century, Doddington Bastle appears to have been in a habitable condition and a sketch from that period shows a steeply pitched roof and what appear to be four original windows in both the second and third storeys.

Defensible churches

Churches were tempting targets for reiving bands and lead taken from their roofs was prized booty, as when a raiding party from Teviotdale 'reived 4 webbes of leed' from the church at Ingram in Northumberland. In response to these depredations, many churches across the Border region were built with stout doors, thick walls, small, narrow windows and, in some instances, included the added security of a defensible tower. Such buildings served as places of relative sanctuary for poorer members of the parish and must have been an infinitely preferable option to hiding out in the surrounding countryside. In 1436, however, the vicar of the church of St Gregory the Great at Kirknewton, in Glendale, Northumberland, was given licence by the Bishop of Durham to say mass in any safe place in the parish, but *outside* the church, as it was thought prudent not to gather all the parishioners in one place at any one time whilst hostilities continued!

OPPOSITE PAGE
Low Cleughs Bastle, Redesdale, Northumberland. Built at the turn of the 17th century, this larger-than-normal bastle would have been the property of a well-to-do farmer. Fresh water came from a small burn to the west of the bastle and the surrounding land bears traces of rig and furrow cultivation and rectangular enclosures for livestock. The building continued to serve as a place of residence until the mid-19th century.



Church of St John the Baptist, Edlingham, Northumberland. Perhaps the finest example of its kind, the church is a rugged, austere building situated in a quiet valley 8km west of Alnwick. At its west end there is a massively strong tower comprising three storeys, which is only accessible from inside the church. Its gloomy interior is lit by a small number of narrow slit windows. The sheer severity of its architecture makes the tower difficult to date, but it was probably added to the church sometime in the early 14th century. Nearby stands Edlingham Castle.

C CHURCH OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST, EDLINGHAM, NORTHUMBERLAND, 16TH CENTURY

In 1498, the Bishop of Durham lamented that 'the priests of that country [the Borders] are most evil, they keep their concubines … they are ignorant almost entirely of letters, so that they cannot read the words of the mass … some are not ordained at all, but merely counterfoils of priests … they dare to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice in profane and ruined places, with vestments torn, ragged and most filthy, unworthy of divine worship … and the said chaplains administer the sacraments to the said thieves without compelling them to restitution'. Whilst searching for a new parson to take over the vast parish of Symondburne, in Northumberland, we hear of the previous incumbent, a Mr Crakenthorpe, who in 1596, 'haithe made refusal thereof, deaminge his body unable to live in so troublesome a place, and his nature not well brooking the perverse nature of so crooked a people'. Of those priests who chose to reside 'amongst this rude, superstitious people', many went 'with sword and dagger and such coarse apparel as they can get'.

As always, there were exceptions, one of the most memorable being Bernard Gilpin, 'the Apostle of the North', who set out annually from his parish at Houghton le Spring in County Durham to preach amongst the wild people of Redesdale, Coquetdale and Tynedale in Northumberland. 'Braving the northern winter he set off on his travels around Christmas time, knowing that even the savage Borderers would come to church during the holy season. If there was a church he would use it, if not, a barn.'

Borderers were not averse to bringing their quarrels into church and were warned not to carry into church 'weapons longer than a cubit and to talk to no one but the priest'. Not surprisingly, however, Gilpin found that in one church 'the congregation was divided into feuding factions armed with swords and javelins and his sermon was twice interrupted by armed combat'. The stouthearted priest would not be swayed from his mission, however, and continued to make his yearly pilgrimage to Northumberland, his courage and tenacity being much admired by his unruly flock.

This altercation between rival factions takes place in the strongly defended church at Edlingham, Northumberland. As the priest, who is himself armed, attempts to separate the protagonists, his wife and daughter wisely retire to the safety of the tower. Originally, any windows in the church would have been small and narrow and a stout door that could be secured with a drawbar defended the entrance. The doorway to the tower was also fitted with a substantial tunnel for a drawbar and access to the upper storeys was by means of a removable ladder. A 'bole-hole', or peephole, set high above the doorway looks down into the nave.



RIGHT
The church of St Anne, Ancroft, Northumberland. Monks from Lindisfarne erected a church here in the early 12th century and in the early 14th century, it was recorded that a 'lytle fortresse nere unto the church' had been added. The tower, which has a vaulted basement and boasts walls 1.35m thick, could only be entered from within the church, via a ladder to a small door at first-floor level. Situated a few kilometres south of Berwick, the tower has extensive views of the surrounding countryside.



BELOW
Hermitage Castle, Liddesdale: This 'grimly majestic' fortress stands on the banks of Hermitage Water and dominates the bleak surrounding countryside. Its strategic importance as a major stronghold in the Scottish Middle March ensured that both Scots and English hotly contested ownership of the castle and as a consequence, throughout the 14th century Hermitage was destined to change hands on a number of occasions.

PRINCIPLES OF DEFENCE

Being at the forefront of Anglo-Scottish warfare for almost four centuries, most of the larger Border strongholds frequently modified and updated their defences in order to withstand the rigours of assault and siege. One of the most awesome and certainly the most sinister in appearance was Hermitage Castle, which stood just 10km from the Border in an isolated part of Liddesdale, perhaps the most turbulent valley in the Borderland.

Hermitage Castle, 'The Strength of Liddesdale'

A Scottish nobleman, Nicholas de Soules, first built a motte and bailey castle on the site of the present castle around 1240. After the Hermitage passed into English hands, the castle became the property of Hugh de Dacre, a Cumbrian nobleman. Around 1360, Dacre replaced the earth and timber stronghold with a stone-built, fortified manor house, which became the nucleus of the present castle. In 1371, the castle fell into the hands of William, Earl of Douglas, a powerful Scottish noble, who transformed Dacre's manor house into the massive and forbidding central tower that we see today. By around 1400, four rectangular corner towers had been added, creating an unusual H-plan structure that was equipped with rows of doorways set high in its walls from which a *bretasche*, or removable timber fighting platform, could be deployed. The entrance to the fortress was at first-floor level in the Kitchen Tower, which, as its name suggests, contained a well-provisioned kitchen along with a number comfortable rooms and private chambers for the lord of the castle. The Well Tower was equipped with a postern gate and a well, whilst the lower floors of the Prison Tower were fitted out with two prisons, one of which was a grim little pit, devoid of light or sanitation.

In the 16th century, the Hermitage's defences were adapted for artillery and a V-shaped gun platform, or ravelin, was erected immediately to the west of the castle. Gun loops were inserted around the walls and the old entrance in the west wall was blocked up, being replaced by a smaller doorway in the south wall.

Barmkins and beacons

Towards the middle of the 16th century, as relations between England and Scotland continued to deteriorate, both governments were anxious to ensure that all fortifications along their frontiers were suitably strengthened against armed incursions, both large and small.

In 1535, an Act was passed in Scotland 'For Bigging [building] of Strengthis on the Bordouris' that required:

> Evry landit man duelland in ye Inland or upoun ye bordouris havand yare ane hundreth pund land of new extent sall big ane sufficient barmkyn apoun his heritage and landis ... of Stane and lyme contenand thre score futis of ye square [18.3m square] ane Eln thick [0.91m] and vj Elyns heicht [5.63m] for the resset and defenss of him, his tennentis and thair gudis in trublous tyme wyt ane toure [tower] in the samin for him self gif he thinkis It expedient.

In addition,

> 'all uthir landit men of smallar Rent and Revenew big pelis and great strenthis as thai plesse for saiffing of thare



In the 16th century a new, small entrance was created in the south wall at Hermitage Castle. The doorway was flanked by the Well Tower and the Kitchen Tower and further defended by a wide-throated gun port that was probably intended for the use of a small cannon.

Hermitage Castle, Liddesdale, 1485 **D**



D HERMITAGE CASTLE, LIDDESDALE, 1485

The main entrance to the Douglas tower house was reached by a timber fore-stair that could be dismantled in times of peril, whilst some kind of drawbridge probably defended the doorway itself. Beyond the door, the passageway leading into the interior of the castle was equipped with two portcullises, an arrangement that allowed the defenders to create a lethal killing zone. By leaving the first portcullis raised, any attackers who breached the door would notice only the second portcullis, and as they advanced towards it, the first portcullis could be lowered behind them, creating a trap from which there was no escape. Set high around the castle walls were a series of rectangular doorways that gave access to a projecting timber fighting platform, or *bretasche*, that could be deployed as and when the need arose. This platform, or gallery, was supported by joists, which fitted into square sockets positioned just below the foot of the doorways. Beneath each socket was a projecting corbel, onto which the joist rested. The platform, which would have been roofed and equipped with hatches, allowed the defenders to keep siege machines away from the walls and, hopefully, to thwart any attempt at undermining. This fighting platform also explains the reason for Hermitage's most striking features, the two flying arches on the shorter east and west faces of the castle. Here, the space above the apex of the arches was blocked in, thus allowing the fighting platform to bypass the deep recesses created by the projecting corner towers. This method of defence was dispensed with in the late 15th century, when most of the openings were blocked up and a permanent battlemented wall-walk was built at a slightly higher level.

> selfis men – tennentis and gudis. And that all the saidis strenthis barnikynnis and pelis be biggit and wtin twa zeris [years] to be completit under ye pane'.

Having carried out a survey of 'Castles, Towers, Barmkins and Fortresses of the Frontier of the (English) East and Middle Marches' in 1541 for Henry VIII, Sir Robert Bowes and Sir Ralph Ellerker discovered that 'for the most parte the fortresses, towres and piles upon the utter side of the frontier of those east marches have been in tymes past rased and casten downe by the Scottes and yet be not repaired which is muche pity to see'. They added that 'it will be great danger if the Scottes shall hereafter be able … to invade those marches and remain any tyme in the same without repulse'.

As a consequence, Acts of 1555 and 1584 specified that all castles and strongholds within 32km of the Border were to be put in order and any open



Repentance Tower, Ecclefechan, Dumfries and Galloway. With panoramic views of the Solway Firth and the surrounding countryside, this 'watchtower of great height' was built in 1565 and served primarily as a signalling station. Border law required 'the Watch to be keeped on the House-head; and never faill burning, so long as the Englishmen remain in Scotland; and with ane bell to be on the Head of the Fire-pan, which shall ring whenever the Fray is, or the Watchman seeing Theives disobedient come over the Water of Annand, or thereabouts, and knows them to be Enemies.'





TOP LEFT
The entrance to Greenknowe Tower, which is situated in the re-entrant angle, is equipped with an iron yett that originally had a timber door outside it. Above it is a date stone of 1581 commemorating the owners, James Seton of Touch and his second wife Jane Edmondstone, with their inscribed initials and coats of arms. The entrance is defended by a narrow gun loop immediately to the left of the doorway and from a canted shot hole in the stair turret above.

TOP RIGHT
Cessford Castle, Eckford, Scottish Borders. Built as a residence for the Kerrs, this massive tower house was one of the major strongholds in the Scottish Middle March. Constructed on an L-plan with walls almost 4m thick, the main block is 19.4 by 13.8m and the projecting wing is around 11m wide. The tower has two entrances, one at ground level in the re-entrant angle, which is protected by the 'false barbican', and one at first-floor level. The site was originally enclosed by a formidable earthwork and ditch.

ground within the vicinity was to be enclosed with quickset hedges and steep ditches, in order to impede the movement of raiders. How effective these measures were and how energetically they were put into practise is not recorded.

Perhaps the sharpest weapon in the Borderer's armoury was vigilance and Bishop Nicholas Ridley, who was born at Willimoteswick, recalled that 'in Tynedale, when I was a boy, I have known my countrymen watch night and day in their harness ... that is in their jacks and spears in their hands'. When raiders were sighted, a network of beacons on both sides of the Border warned of their approach and an order issued by the Earl of Sussex instructed Wardens of the English Marches to ensure that 'every man that hath a castle or towre of stone shall, upon everie fray raysed in the night, give warning to the countrie by fire in the topps of the castle or towre'.

Because of its strategic location, one tower in the Scottish West March was built primarily to give warning of invasion. Built by Lord Herries in 1565 and strategically situated on a hill high above Hoddom Castle in Dumfries and Galloway, was 'The wache toure upoun Trailtrow, callit Repentance', which was equipped with a 'greit bell and fyir pan put on it'. On the Scottish side of the Border, instructions indicating the strength of the approaching force were quite precise:

> The firing of 'a [one] baile is warnyng of ther cumyng, quhat [whatever] power thai be of. Twa bailes togedder at anis, [at the same time] thai cumyng indeide [indeed]. Fower [four] bailes, ilk ane besyde uther [each beside the other] and all [fired] at anys [once] ... be suthfast [sure] knowledge that thai ar of gret power and menys [menace].

As raiders approached, tenants and folk who lived near the tower would seek protection within the safety of the barmkin, and once a tower house, or small castle, did come under attack, defenders could launch a variety of missiles from the security of the battlements or parapet walk. Should the barmkin wall be breached, and the tower itself threatened, large rocks seem to have been useful in discouraging attempts to undermine the walls. As the use of handguns – 'hagbuts' (arquebuses) and 'daggs' (wheel-lock pistols) – became prevalent, ventilation slits in the basement walls were re-fashioned into gun loops and in

order to give as wide a field of fire as possible, some gun loops were widely splayed. However, these openings proved to be a mixed blessing, as marksmen could use the splay to guide a projectile straight into the interior. Vertical dumb-bell loops lessened that particular risk and strategically placed loops of the inverted keyhole type were a popular choice in many tower houses. In the event of the door and inner yett being 'burst', the narrow newel stairway could be blocked with boulders or furniture. Once inside the tower, however, an attacker could fill the entrance and stairway with combustible material and smoke the trapped defenders out, a method known as 'scumfishing'. Alternatively, having gained access to the basement, they could lay charges and threaten to blow the tower up, at which point the defenders usually attempted to surrender.

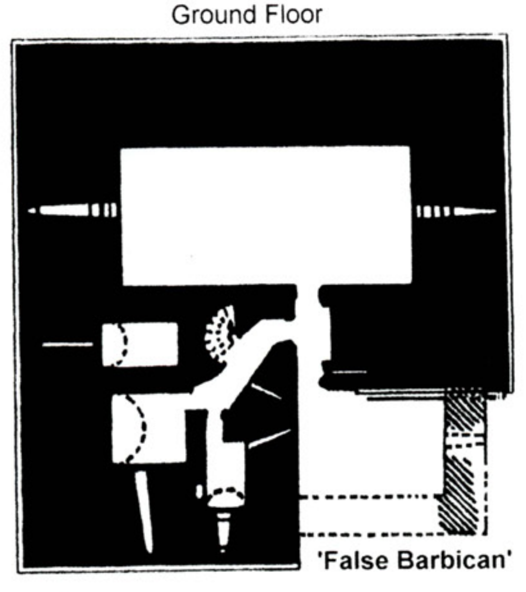
As detailed below, whilst most small tower houses could never withstand a determined assault, the more robust type could sometimes prevail against a large attacking force, even when accompanied by light artillery, as at Cessford Castle, near Jedburgh.

Siege of Cessford Castle, 1523

Cessford Castle, a stronghold of the Kerrs, is a massively strong tower house built on an L-plan and lies about 10km north-east of Jedburgh. Standing on high ground commanding the valley of the Kale Water, Cessford Castle was regarded as one of the strongest holds in Scotland. In May 1523, when Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey and veteran of Flodden, laid siege to the fortress he found it to be defended by an outer 'barbican', or barmkin, which had been 'vawmewred with earth of the best sort that I have seen' (meaning that the defenders had piled a sloping bank of earth against the outer face of the wall in order to absorb the effects of bombardment), and observed that within the 'barbican', the 'donjeon' (tower) was protected by a 'false barbican', which was a screen wall that closed the re-entrant angle of the tower.

Accompanying Surrey's army was a train of 11 small cannon, and while these pieces commenced a bombardment of the 'vawmewre', Surrey's infantry, using scaling ladders, stormed the 'barbican'. Once inside, they attempted to raise their ladders against the tower itself, but a withering barrage of gunfire drove them back out. At this point, however, two culverins began to concentrate their fire on a blocked-up window, set about 1.83m above ground level in one of the tower walls, and were able to create a small opening. Encouraged by the prospect of a substantial reward, three gunners then attempted to create a breach in the wall by laying charges in the opening. Realizing immediately what was going on, the Scots managed to ignite the powder before their task was completed and the ensuing explosion, whilst causing no further damage to the tower, badly injured the unlucky gunners.

As Surrey wondered what to do next, the owner of the tower, Sir Andrew Kerr, Warden of the Scottish Middle March, who had been engaged elsewhere, returned to Cessford. Whilst no doubt taken aback, Kerr struck a bargain with Surrey whereby the castle was handed over on condition that the garrison would be spared and that he could remove all his personal 'bags and baggage'. When the English withdrew from the Scottish Borders later that year, Kerr was able to reclaim and repair his castle.



Ground floor plan of Cessford Castle.

Perched on a rocky outcrop, or 'craig', Smailholm Tower is without doubt the most picturesquely situated tower house in the Scottish Borders. Built in the mid-15th century, it served successive Pringle lairds as a secure residence and family seat for over 100 years.



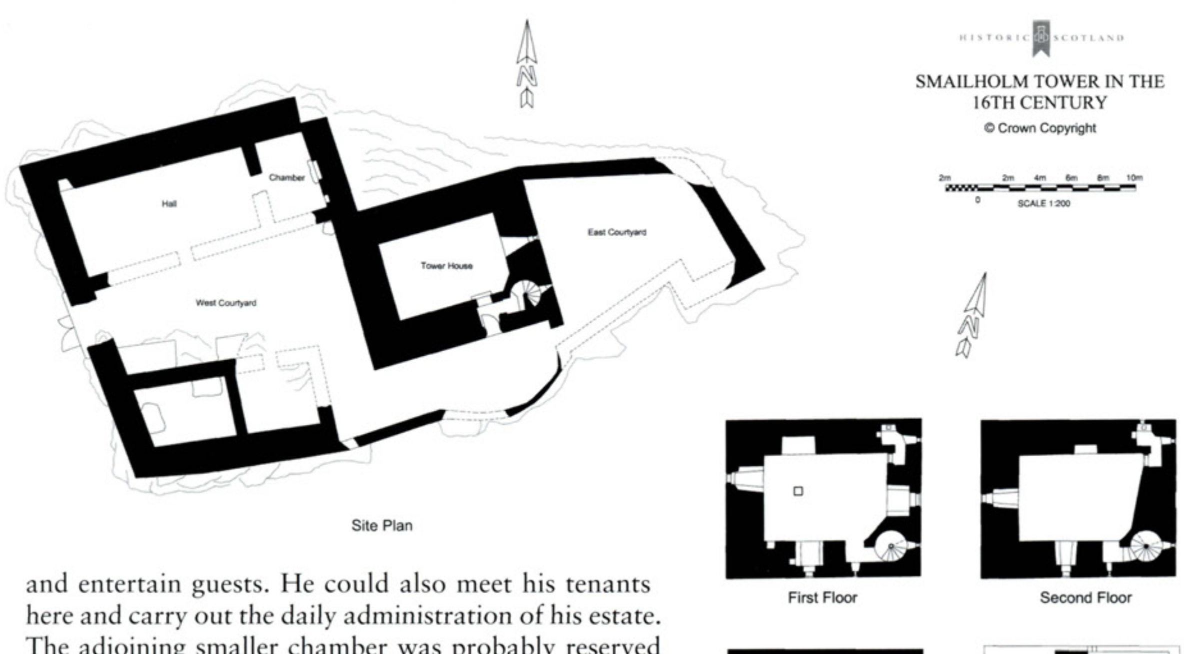
TOUR OF A TOWER HOUSE – SMAILHOLM

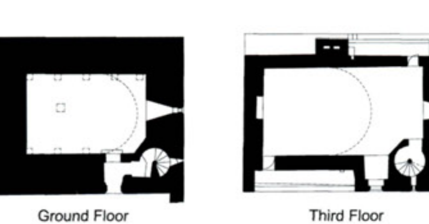
Situated in the Tweed Valley on a rocky knoll 8km west of Kelso, the slender silhouette of Smailholm Tower stands like a lone sentinel overlooking the beautiful, rolling countryside of the Scottish Middle March. Lying 16km from the border with England, no other tower house in the Borderland so readily evokes the excitement of bygone days, when the 'steill bonnetts' 'were ever ryding' and swept across the Border Marches with 'fyre and sword'.

The tower house was probably built in the early 15th century as a secure residence for the Pringles, an influential Border surname, who are recorded as holding the estate of Smailholm Craig from around 1455. The stronghold stands on the north edge of the crag, and on three sides was enclosed by a barmkin wall that varied between 1 and 2m in thickness and incorporated stretches of wall-walk. The wall followed the line of the crag, creating two courtyards, the larger being to the west of the tower, the smaller to the east. To the south, a narrow stretch of ground in front of the doorway to the tower linked the two courts, whilst the wall of the tower house itself defended the central northern perimeter.

Entry to the enclosure was through a round-arched gateway in the west barmkin wall, the door of which could be secured by a sliding drawbar. This gateway led into the larger of the two courts, which on its north side contained a stone-built, single-storey hall and chamber, and on its south side a well-provisioned kitchen block. Any notion that large numbers of livestock would be herded into the barmkin in times of trouble are quickly dispelled by the size of the central courtyard, there being space for perhaps two or three horses and a small number of cattle or sheep that could be slaughtered if food supplies became exhausted.

The hall was built to provide additional accommodation to that in the tower house and allowed the laird a spacious room in which he could greet





and entertain guests. He could also meet his tenants here and carry out the daily administration of his estate. The adjoining smaller chamber was probably reserved for the laird's private use; perhaps a place where matters of a confidential nature could be discussed. The smaller east court did not contain any buildings and may well have served as a storage area or a garden. Smailholm has no well and drinking water must have been collected in rain barrels, or drawn from the millpond to the south-east.

The rectangular, five-storey tower house measures 12.1 by 9.7m and stands 20m high over walls 2m thick. The walls were built of black dolerite rubble, whilst the quoins, dressings, windows and doorways have been fashioned from a deep-red sandstone. All windows in the tower house were small and protected by iron grilles. The only entrance to the tower was through

ABOVE
Smailholm Tower, Roxburghshire. Site plan and floor plans (Historic Scotland. Crown Copyright material is reproduced with the permission of the Queen's Printer for Scotland)



LEFT
Even after 1548, when the Pringles had become 'assured Scots', Smailholm must have remained a tempting target for raiders, and in such troubled times it is doubtful if the dormer window, which now intrudes onto the south parapet-walk, would have been allowed to compromise the defensive qualities of the tower house. It was probably added nearer the turn of the 17th century.

This view of Smailholm gives some idea of the original height and strength of the west barmkin wall, which was defended by a parapet-walk. Note the remains of the arched gateway that gave access to the west courtyard.

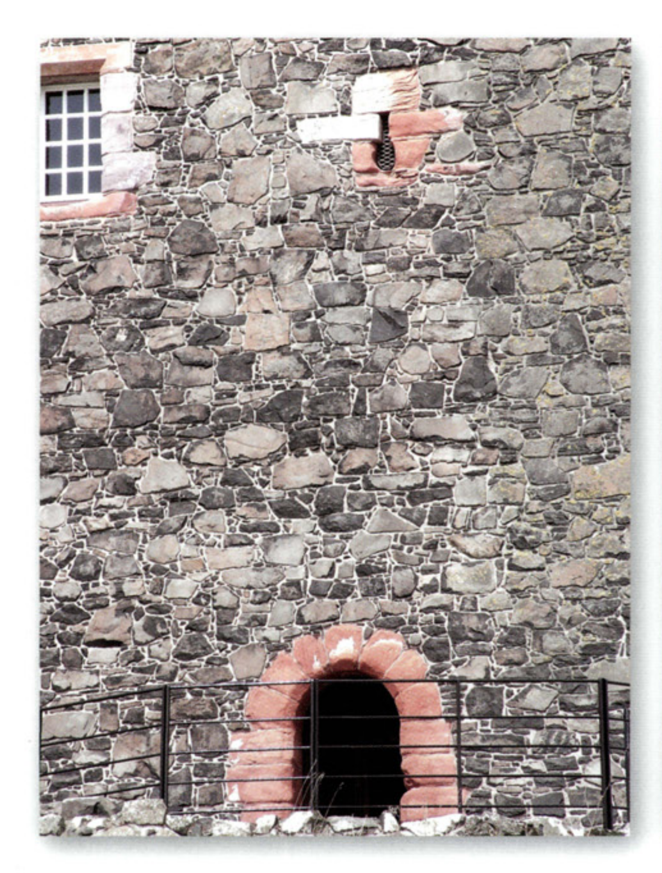


an arched doorway at ground level on the south side, which was defended by an outer wooden door with an iron yett immediately behind it. Above the doorway, additional protection was provided by a gun loop of the inverted-keyhole variety, the sill of which is dished in order to allow a firearm to be aimed downwards at a more acute angle.

The doorway opens into a barrel-vaulted basement, which is equipped with an entresol that was reached by means of a ladder. Both these floors were used for storage, the whole area being lit by a narrow, barred window in the east side. The timber floor of the entresol was carried on stone corbels



In the great hall at Smailholm, the fireplace is adorned with two carvings, one of a heart the other of a bearded face. A heart was incorporated in the Pringle family crest, whilst the bearded face may be a rustic portrait of the Pringle laird who built the tower. Note the massive lintel above the fireplace and above it, a relieving arch.





and above it a small hatch in the ceiling of the vault opened into the great hall above, which must have proved useful when hauling up stores and heavy provisions such as coal.

To the right of the main doorway, in the south-eastern corner of the building, a newel stair gives access to the three upper storeys. The first floor served as the laird's hall and is well lit by three generously proportioned windows replete with comfortable stone window seats. The hall boasts a rather grand fireplace, and through a door in the north-eastern corner there is a quite civilized latrine closet complete with toilet seat, lantern recess and a small window.

The second floor, which would have served as the laird's private quarters and bedroom, is similarly disposed albeit on a less grandiose scale. The garderobe serving these chambers is also sited in the north-eastern corner and, like the unit below, was equipped with a latrine chute in the north wall, which spilled its contents outside the enclosure.

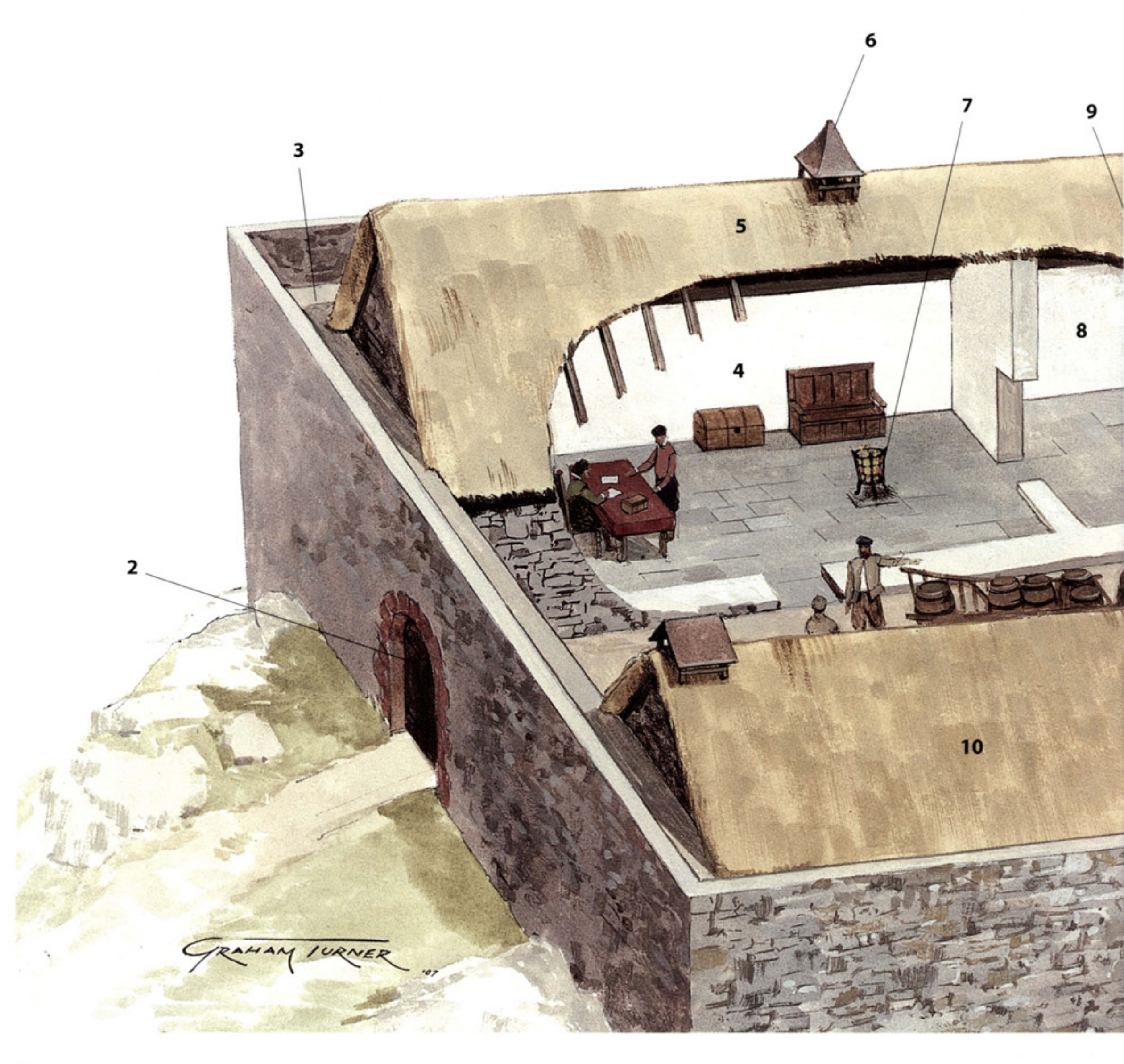
The third floor had a fireplace in each gable and was divided into two rooms that would have provided accommodation for members of the laird's immediate family. Sometime in the mid-16th century, however, this topmost storey was greatly altered, presumably in response to a series of raids that plagued Smailholm during the 'Rough Wooing' of the 1540s. Two doorways gave access to parapet-walks on the north and south sides, and on the north side there is a stone seat for a lookout and a recess for his lantern. The top storey was also given a barrel-vaulted ceiling, the outer face forming a roof that was covered with stone slabs. At around the same time, a wide-mouthed, oval gun loop was inserted high up in the west gable wall and covered the entrance to the barmkin.

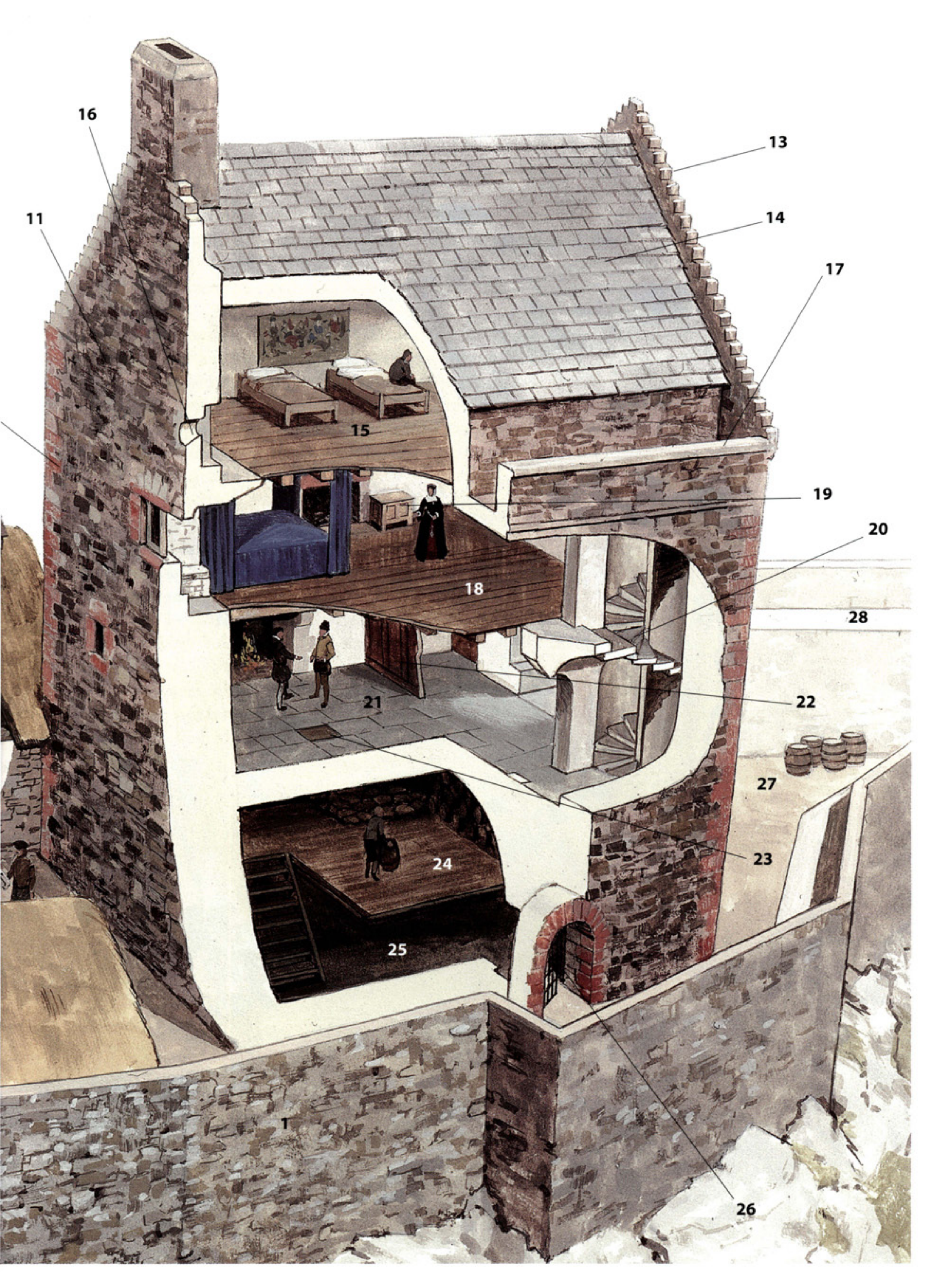
TOP LEFT
The doorway in the south wall of the tower house shows to perfection the use of contrasting red sandstone that gives Smailholm much of its character. The gun loop, which is of the inverted keyhole variety, was intended to defend the doorway below.

TOP RIGHT
Whilst the outer wooden door at Smailholm is a modern replacement, this hefty iron yett is apparently an original fixture.

E Smailholm Tower, 1560s

1. Barmkin wall
2. Gateway into west courtyard
3. Wall walk
4. Hall
5. Thatched roof
6. Smoke vent
7. Central brazier
8. Private chamber
9. Fireplace – 'hingin' lum'
10. Kitchen block
11. Black dolerite
12. Red sandstone
13. Crow-stepped gable
14. Stone flags
15. Top storey – barrel vaulted
16. Oval gun loop
17. Parapet
18. Laird's private quarters
19. Chest, or cist
20. Newel stair
21. Great hall
22. Timber partition (conjectural)
23. Hatch
24. Entresol
25. Vaulted basement
26. Iron yett (outer door omitted)
27. East courtyard
28. Wall walk




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It has been estimated that around 50 people lived and worked on the land around Smailholm, and from both parapets evidence of previous habitation can clearly be seen. Along with a number of boundary walls, yards and enclosures for livestock, traces remain of at least four buildings, which undoubtedly housed some of the laird's tenants. To the south-west, there is a building that may have been a substantial stable, and whilst some of the surrounding land was given over to rough grazing for sheep and cattle, there is extensive evidence of rig cultivation, where oats and barley were grown. Several stone-lined drains channelled water to the millpond that lies to the south-east of the tower house. It was used to operate a grain mill that existed somewhere near the early 18th-century farmhouse of Sandyknowe.

On the north parapet-walk at Smailholm, this watchman's seat was built onto the side of the chimneystack in order to provide a little warmth during long, cold winter nights. Next to it is a recess for a lantern. The views from the parapets are outstanding and on a clear day, Bamburgh Castle is visible to the south and Hume Castle to the north.

In the course of the 'Rough Wooing', some Scots became so worn down by English raids that in exchange for an assurance that their own estates would remain unmolested, they agreed not to carry out raids into England and promised not to interfere with English forays into Scotland. These men became known as 'assured Scots' and in 1548 the Pringles joined their ranks. By 1574, the family had abandoned Smailholm as their principal seat of residence and had moved to an estate they held near Galashiels. In 1645, Smailholm became the property of the Scotts of Harden, who replaced the outer hall and chamber in the west court with a two-storey house, its height being marked by a raggle, or groove, in the west wall of the tower house which would have received the edge of its roof. At about the same time, the barmkin wall enclosing the east court was demolished and replaced with a much less substantial structure. Apparently, an 'old dowager lady' lived at Smailholm at the beginning of the 18th century and when she died, the site was finally deserted in favour of more comfortable accommodation at Sandyknowe farmhouse, where Sir Walter Scott spent his childhood.

EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE TOWER HOUSE

Although the tower house was a symbol of his authority and prestige, the Border lord seems to have preferred to live in more commodious accommodation built within his barmkin wall, or even without in a dwelling house lying close to his tower, which would serve as a refuge in times of danger.

Even in such perilous times the tower, or outer hall, was first and foremost a family home, and whilst the emphasis on security was unavoidable, womenfolk no doubt did what they could to brighten up these quite spartan environments. As we have noted, interior walls were usually plastered or panelled and would have been draped with tapestries or brightly coloured banners, whilst floors were covered with dried moor grasses and strewn with aromatic herbs. Window seats were made comfortable with decorated cushions and would have been a favourite haunt for the lord's wife and daughters when they were engaged in darning or needlework.

Furniture would have been sparse and what there was would have been robustly constructed and strictly practical. Generally, towers were furnished with two or maybe three beds, a couple of tables, some long, low benches and a number of stools. In 1624, at Halton Tower in Northumberland, furnishings included 'a long sattle bed, one mattress and a feather bed and a pair of blankets. Also, one long table, halfe a score of cushins and three long cushins for the windows, a long table, 18 buffet stools and beds with courtings and vallance'. The better-off tower house probably contained some silver, or pewter, in the shape of plate or candlesticks. When not in use, such valuables were locked away in long wooden chests.

The Borderer lived on a fairly basic diet that included beef and mutton, which were boiled or roasted, along with fowl, salt and freshwater fish, cheese and bread. Whilst meals could be washed down with milk or water, some tower houses incorporated a 'brew house' within the barmkin and ale was always a popular choice.



Although the village of Corbridge was a frequent target for Scottish raiders, these rather cosy residential quarters on the first floor of the Vicar's Pele, seem to suggest a quite comfortable and civilized lifestyle, which must have been something of a rarity in such troubled times. Note the remaining stone corbels, which would have carried the upper floor.

Borderers on both sides of the line generated wealth by breeding horses, cattle and sheep and there were certainly plenty of them around if the numbers quoted in the 'complayntes and redresses' were even half true. Sheep were reared for wool and mutton, whilst cattle provided milk or were slaughtered for beef. Transhumance was practised, being the seasonal movement of livestock to higher pastures, and as the historian William Camden records, they were 'a martiall kind of men, who frome the moneth of Aprill unto August, lye out scattering and summering (as they tearme it) with their cattle in little cottages here and there which they call Sheales and Shealings'. In 1597, however, it was reported that in Tynedale raiders not only forced honest folk from their houses, but also from their 'sommer sheils, which is theire chefest profitt'.

In spite of the rigours of life on the Border Marches, some time was reserved for more leisurely pursuits and at the day's end, having settled down to his meal in front of a roaring fire, the Border lord and his family could be entertained by the recitation of ballads, which celebrated their way of life and were often accompanied by the small pipes. Men enjoyed playing 'at the cards', and if the Border lord was a learned man, he may well have owned one or two 'lytle beuks'. Horse races were always well attended and the game of football attracted players from all levels of society. Sir Robert Carey, a Border officer who seemed to follow the game, mentions 'a great match made at football' and alludes to a moment of personal good fortune as 'having the ball at my foot'.

BORDER STRONGHOLDS AT WAR

The effects of raiding

It was said of Scots raiders that they were all 'alike in their plundering propensities, knowing no measure of law but the length of their swords' and it is well documented that raiders on both sides of the Border excelled in 'breaking towers' and 'very strong houses', 'cutting up their doores with axes' and leaving the inhabitants 'mangled' or 'slain in plain daylight'. Many of these raiders were formidable men who had military experience hard won in Europe, such as an Elliot named Martin's Gibbe, who was slain when reivers from Tynedale ran a foray into Liddesdale. He was reported to be 'a notorious offender in England' and was 'brought up in the wars in Flanders and France. Besides being a soldier and trained in war [he] was a captain and principal leader' amongst the Elliots.

On occasion, such men came in force and devastated whole valleys as in 1593, when 'William Ellott … of Liddesdale accompanied by 1000 men on horse and foote, who in partinge them selfes into foure companies, forraged throughe Tindale [Tynedale] in foure severall places: swepeing the goods of the countrey before them'.

Even as late as 1596, Sir Ralph Eure recommended that in order to 'fortify this decayed frontier' – meaning Tynedale and Redesdale – the English government should 'erect in each a "bastile" or strong house, where an officer "stronglie attended" might dwell'. In support of his argument, he points out that on the Scottish side of the Border 'the Scots have erected "stronge tower houses" planting a headsman of the clan therein, surrounded by the strength of his name'.

Eure's fears were fully justified for only those dwelling within well-defended towers could hope to survive the constant raiding. On 12 October 1596, Sir William Selby, writing to a kinsman, reported that:

> The Scots attacked Weetewood tower till after midnight, and when they could not win it, spoiled the town of cattle, sheep, and household stuff lefte not a coate to put on any person in it; and turned a woman newly broughte to bed out of the clothes she laye in … on the 20th they came down to Downam obout 9'o clock at night, hewed up the gates of the barnkyn with axes 'which helde them tyll cockcrowe in the morninge', but was so defended, that they got nothing; whereon they went to Branxton and spoiled your tenants of 16 cattle and 4 score sheep.

He lists a catalogue of subsequent raids and states that 'In short, there is no night without spoil, and without some remedy they will lay the country waste'. He added a final despairing postscript, stating that 'None of your friends dare lie in their beds at night, but hide themselves in the fields except such as lie in towers'.

Not all defences fared as well as Weetewood and Downam, especially when attacked in force, as witnessed by this complaint against the Duke of Buccleuch, who in 1596, 'with his trumpeter and 500 men … coming to the stone howse of Banckeheade upon Eske', succeeded in 'forcibly bursting and burning the door, and the iron yeat, taking prisoners and household stuff'.

The 'Rough Wooing', 1544–49

Some idea of the scale of the devastation wrought whilst the 'Rough Wooing' was in full swing can be gleaned from the following account of Sir Ralph Eure's raid into the Merse and Teviotdale in 1544. Jedburgh and Kelso were burnt to the ground and the damage 'done upon the Scots' was as follows:

> The whole number of towns, towers, steeds, barnekins, parish churches, bastel-houses, seized, destroyed, and burnt, in all the Border country, was an hundred and ninety two, Scots slain four hundred and three, prisoners taken eight hundred and sixteen, nolt [cattle] ten thousand three hundred and eighty six, sheep twelve thousand four hundred and ninety two, horses 1296, gayts [goats] two hundred, bolls of corn eight hundred and fifty, insight gear – an indefinite quantity.

In 1547, Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset and Lord Protector of England, launched a two-pronged assault into the Scottish Lowlands. Supported by the English fleet, which sailed up the east coast, Somerset led the main invasion from Berwick, his well-equipped army accompanied by '15 great pieces of ordnance' and contingents of hardened mercenaries from Italy and Spain. In the west, Lord Wharton, of Solway Moss fame, launched a more modest diversionary invasion into the Scottish West March. It should be pointed out that these incursions were often carried out with the help of 'assured Scots', many of whom saw the advantage of a union by marriage with England and were willing to take up arms in support of their cause.

Accompanying Somerset was a certain William Patten, who was appointed to administer martial law in the provost marshal's court. A shrewd observer with a fine eye for detail, Patten's account of the campaign has left us with a vivid idea of the impact of full-scale warfare across the Border region and the way border fortresses fared in the face of a concerted assault.

The capture of Thornton and Innerwick 1547

Shortly before the battle of Pinkie, the English army accepted the surrender of Dunglas Castle, and on marching northwards, encountered 'two Piles or Holds, Thornton and Anderwick [Innerwick], both set on craggy foundation, and divided, a stone's cast asunder, by a deep gut, wherein ran a little river.

The siege of Norham Castle, 1497 **F**



Thornton belonged to Lord Hume, and was kept then by one Tom Trotter'.

Faced with a daunting assault by the English army, Trotter came out of the tower, ostensibly to negotiate with Somerset, but instead 'straight locked up sixteen poor soldiers ... fast within the house, took the keys with him, and commanding them they should defend the house and tarry within till his return, which should be on the morrow with munitions and relief; he with his prickers, pricked quite his ways'. Although having been quite obviously abandoned, the loyal garrison, on being summoned to surrender, refused and 'were straight assailed ... Thornton by a battery of four of our great pieces of ordnance, and certain ... hackbutters [arquebusiers] to watch the loopholes and windows on all sides', while Innerwick was covered by:

> A sort [company] of these hackbutters alone. Who so well bestirred themselves, that these keepers [defenders] had rammed up their outer doors, cloyed and stopped up their stairs within, and kept themselves aloft for defence of their house about the battlements; the hackbutters got in, and fired the underneath, whereby being greatly troubled with smoke and smother, and brought in desperation of defence, they called pitifully, over their walls, to my Lord's grace, for mercy.

Somerset was moved to accept their surrender, but before the messenger could pass on the news:

> The hackbutters had got up to them, and killed eight of them aloft. One leapt over the walls, and, running more than a furlong after, was slain without, in the water. All this while, at Thornton, our assault and their defence was stoutly continued; but well perceiving how on the one side they were battered, mined on the other, kept in with hackbutters round about, and some of our men within also occupying all the house under them, for they had likewise shopped [shut] up themselves in the highest of their house, and so to do nothing, inward

F THE SIEGE OF NORHAM CASTLE, 1497

In 1497, amidst growing tension between England and Scotland, James IV decided upon a pre-emptive strike across the river Tweed, his target being the Bishop of Durham's fortress at Norham. Accompanying James and the Scottish Army on this 'great raid' was his prized 'old and heavy artillery of iron' and foremost in the train was to be the massive bombard, 'Mons'.

Named after its place of manufacture (the suffix 'Meg' was added much later), 'Mons' was commissioned in 1449 by Duke Philip the Good as a gift for James II, the grandfather of James IV. The awesome gun was 4.57m in length, weighed 15,366lb and boasted a gaping 0.46m bore. At that time, it must have been the most formidable piece of artillery in the British Isles.

Ironically, James II, who championed the use of heavy artillery and took 'plesure in discharging gret gunis', lost his life in 1460 during the siege of Roxburgh when a Flemish bombard exploded next to him. It is recorded that the King's thigh was 'doung [broken] in twa ... be quhilke [by which] he was stricken to the grund and dieit haistilie thereof, quhilke [which] grettumlie discuragit all his nobill gentlemen and freindis that war standand aboot him'.

On 20 July, amidst much ceremony, the great iron gun left Edinburgh Castle to the tune of 'minstrels that played before Mons doune the gait'. Hauled by 84 carthorses and eight oxen under the control of 110 drivers, the cavalcade came to a halt barely a mile from the Castle when the carriage carrying the gun collapsed under its enormous weight and a 'new cradill' had to be built on site.

Eventually arriving on the north bank of the Tweed around 5 August, 'Mons' was removed from her carriage and installed in a gun emplacement about a mile upriver from Norham Castle. In preparation for firing, the barrel was laid upon a bed of timber and sighted in on the castle. Due to its enormous weight, it was in all probability unnecessary to rope the barrel into position.

Under the admiring gaze of the King and his courtiers, the Scottish artillery commenced an enthusiastic bombardment, and soon ammunition was running low and new gunstones had to be ordered from Edinburgh. The siege continued for 15 days, but under the steadfast command of Norham's captain, Thomas Garth, the rugged old fortress absorbed the punishment and, in spite of damage to its north-facing walls, held firm against the Scottish bombardment. When news was received of the approach of a relief force under the Earl of Surrey, the siege was lifted and the Scots withdrew.

James IV would return 15 years later and although 'Mons' did not accompany him on that occasion, Norham fell to his guns. It was, however, to be a short-lived victory in a campaign that would end in defeat and death amidst the mud of Flodden Field.

G ATTACK ON A BASTLE HOUSE, 1595

For the most part, Borderers were farmers and the bastle was primarily a farmhouse, its position largely being dictated by the suitability of land around it. Although rarely found in positions that could be described as strong, most bastles were within easy reach of their neighbours or in clusters as at Wall, in the Tyne Valley. However, even clusters could not stand against a large force as when 'men of the [English] middle march burnt Lessuden [Scotland], in which were sixteen strong bastel-houses, slew several of the owners and burnt much corn'.

Having secured valuable livestock in the basement, defence amounted to little more than holding out through an attack and hoping that a neighbour would answer the fray and offer support, or that the raiders would eventually give up and move on to easier pickings. Although bastles have been described as built for 'passive defence', given the nature of the folk within, they doubtless defended themselves 'in stout fashion' with dagg, hackbut, boiling water or crossbow. Note the small, barred windows and the 'quenching hole', set above the basement doorway in the end wall. The bastle house is based on a drawing by Peter Ryder.

> or outward, neither by shooting of base [small cannon] whereof they had one or two, nor tumbling of stones, the things of their chief annoyance whereby they might be able to resist our power or save themselves; they plucked in a banner that afore they had set out in defiance, and put out over the walls, a white linen clout tied on a stick's end, crying all, with one tune for 'Mercy!' but having answer by the whole voice of the assailers 'They were traitors! It was too late!' they plucked in their stick and sticked up the banner of defiance again, shot off, hurled stones, and did what else they could, with great courage on their side, and little hurt on ours.

The beleaguered garrison tried once more to surrender, and on being refused requested that they be allowed to reconcile themselves with God and be hanged, so as 'not to die in malice'. Once again, Somerset was moved to spare their lives. The tower 'was soon after blown with powder, that no more than one half fell straight down to rubbish and dust, the rest stood, all to be shaken with rifts and chinks. Innerwick was burned and all the houses of office [servants houses] and stacks of corn around them both.'

Storming of Annan Church 1547

Meanwhile, in the Scottish West March, Lord Wharton with six small cannon and the help of the pro-English Earl of Lennox, accepted the surrender of his first objective, Castle Milk, then decided to 'make a rode yn to overthrowe and caste downe a certen chirche and steple called the steple of Annande … a strong place, and very noiseome always unto our men, as they passed that way'.

The church was garrisoned by a Scots force led by James Lyone, who had been given his command by James Hamilton, the Earl of Arran and Regent of Scotland.

Laying siege to the church, Wharton reported that:

> Having in ordenuance but a facon, a faconette an foure quarter facons … [we] devised that night how we shulde maik warr against the house on the morrowe. At viijth of the clok in the mornying we laid those sex pieces to beit the battailling, and appoyntid certain archers and hagbutters to maik warre also until a paveis of tymbre might be drawn to the sidde of the steplee, under which sex pyoners might work to have undermynened the sam; in putting these to effectes, they in the house made sharpe warre, and slewe foure of our men and hurt divers others. And with grett stones from the steple toppe, brooke the paveis after it was sett, and being in that extrymytie, lakking ordenuance for that purpose, we caused certane pyoners cutte the walle of the east end of the quere [choir], overthuart abone the earth, and caused the hooll ende to falle, wherewith the roofe and tymbre falling inward, slew vij Scotesmen. After that we caused the pieces to be


GRAHAM TURNER

laid to shoot at the doore of the steplee which was a house hight, and that house hight rampered with earthe, and caused them further to myen [mine].

In the face of certain defeat 'the captain, [Lyonne] about 4pm took down his pensall of defyaunce'and the following day the successful besiegers 'cutt and raiced down the churche wallis and steplee'. Patten reports that Wharton 'took 72 prisoners, the keepers of the same, burnt the spoil for cumber [encumbrance] of carriage' and then 'brent [burnt] the towne [of Annan], not leving any thing therein unbrent'. All the ordnance and munitions in the church tower were taken to Carlisle.

However, on one occasion at least a small but determined garrison were able to inflict a stinging defeat on a confident, well equipped and numerically superior attacking force.

Assault on Wark Castle by the Duke of Albany, 1523

One of the most resilient fortifications in the Borderland was the English castle at Wark-on-Tweed, which for almost 500 years played a major role in the ebb and flow of Border warfare.

The castle is situated about 13km west of Norham and stands on the banks of the river Tweed, where it commands an important ford crossing. In the early 12th century, Walter Espec established a motte and bailey castle here, which in time was rebuilt in stone. The mere presence of this fortress seemed to infuriate the Scots, who persistently attacked and besieged it, and on a number of occasions the castle was razed to the ground and then rebuilt by the English.

The Earl of Northumberland called it 'the stay and key of all this country ... situate for annoyance and defence in the best place of all the frontiers', but in 1513, Wark Castle fell to the mighty ordnance of James IV. By 1517, however, the castle was back in service and had been developed as an artillery fortress. The unusual, six-sided keep was:

> Made foure howses hight, and in every Stage, there is five grete murdour holes, shot with grete volutes of Stone, except one stage which is with Tymbre. So that grete bumbardes may be shot out at icheon of them. And there is a well made with trap dores thorow the middest of every hows for the heasing up of ordinaunce.

This 'tower of great strength and height ... was encircled by two walls, the outer including a large space into which the inhabitants of the country used to fly ... in times of war; the inner of much smaller extent, but fortified more strongly with ditches and towers.'

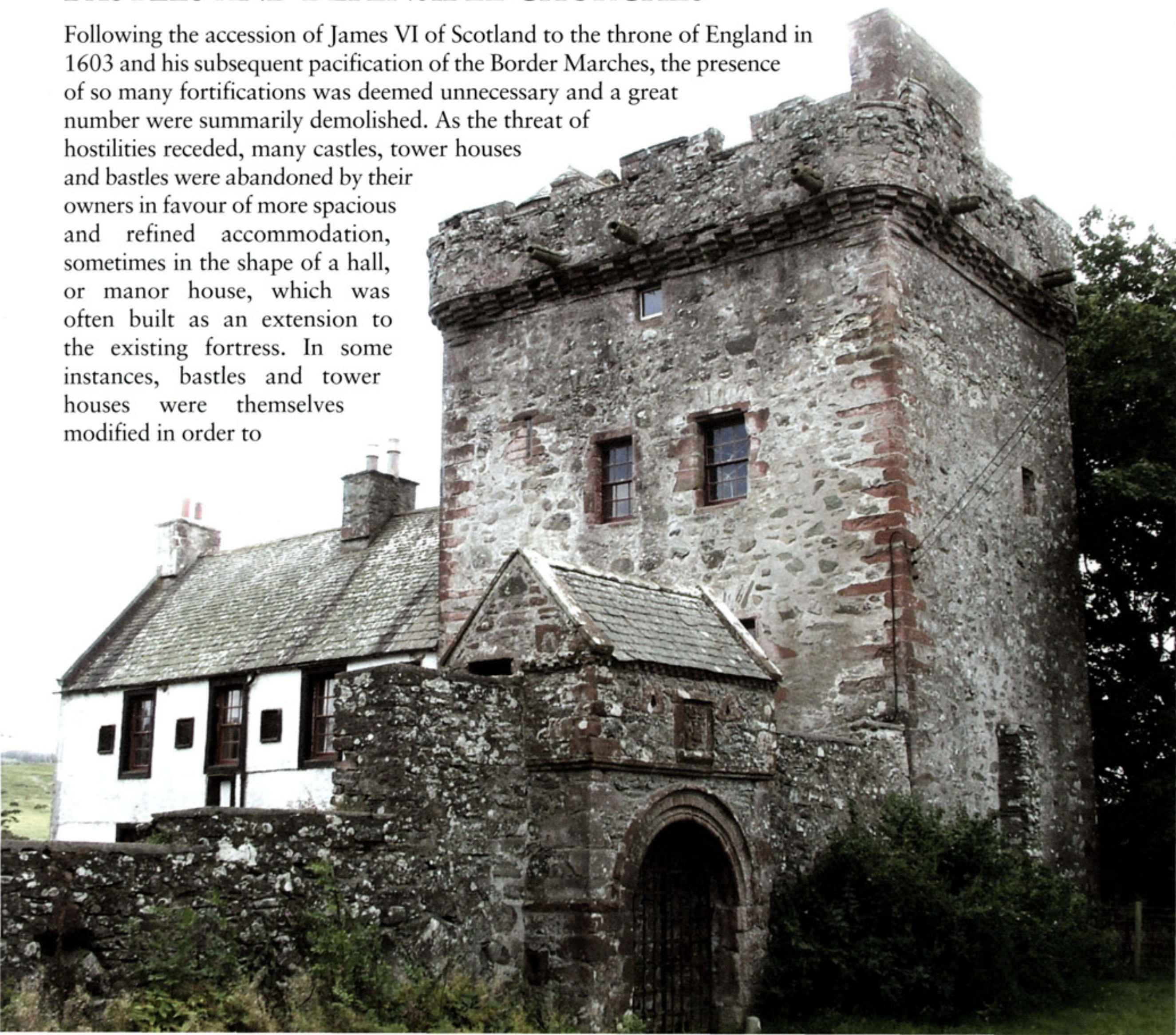
In retaliation to Surrey's incursions into the Scottish borders in 1523, the Duke of Albany, a potential heir to the Scottish throne, mounted an amphibious attack on Wark Castle with a force of over 2,000 French allies supported by a 'chosen band' of Scots. Having bombarded the castle with cannon fire from across the river Tweed and succeeded in damaging the outer defences, the combined force breached the outer ward. Although they 'were sore galled by the shot of those above them in the tower' they then managed to fight their way into the inner ward. At this juncture, the castle's commander, Sir William Lisle, and his outnumbered garrison of 100 men, resolved that it was more honourable 'to dye in fight, than to be murthered with gunnes' and fiercely counterattacked the French. 'Freely setting about them' Lisle and his doughty garrison 'not only drove them out of the inner ward but also out of the outer

ward and slew of the French men 10 persons. And so the said French men went [back] over the water' leaving 300 dead behind them. Albany's reaction to their humiliating return is not recorded, but on receiving news of the approach of the Earl of Surrey at the head of a strong relieving force, he withdrew his forces.

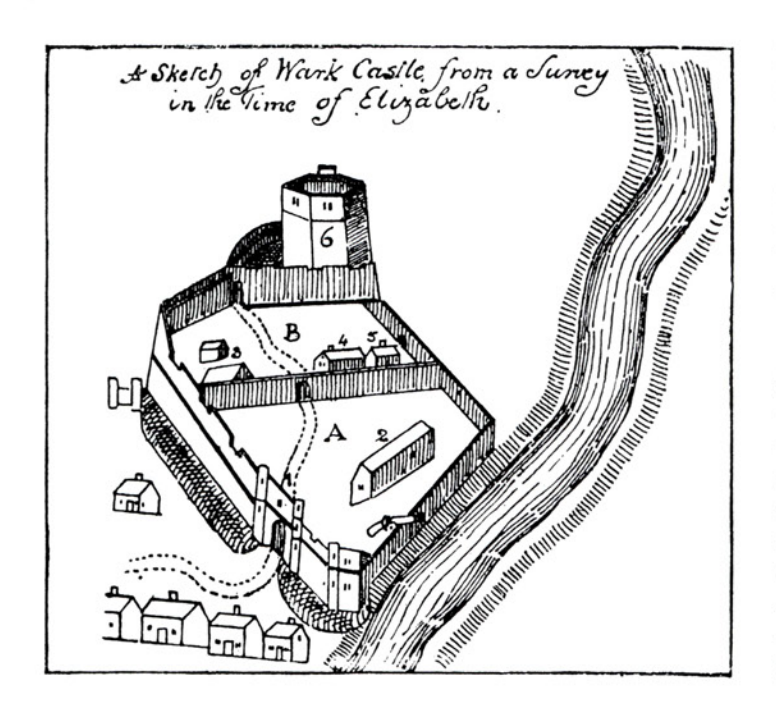
Arriving at Wark shortly afterwards, Surrey added 'bulwarks of earth' to the castle's defences and no doubt inspired by the recent action, remarked that the keep was 'the strongest thing I have ever seen'. However, the royal commissioners considered the castle not so strong as Surrey supposed, for they found that the foundations of the keep were only 60cm deep and would be susceptible to mining. Near the end of the 16th century, some of the buildings had become so dilapidated that 'no man dare dwell in them & if speedy remedy be not had, they will fall flatte to the ground'. Repairs were half-heartedly undertaken but, by the mid-17th century, the fortress had slipped into a complete state of 'decaie'.

THE FATE OF THE CASTLES, TOWER HOUSES, BASTLES AND DEFENSIBLE CHURCHES

Following the accession of James VI of Scotland to the throne of England in 1603 and his subsequent pacification of the Border Marches, the presence of so many fortifications was deemed unnecessary and a great number were summarily demolished. As the threat of hostilities receded, many castles, tower houses and bastles were abandoned by their owners in favour of more spacious and refined accommodation, sometimes in the shape of a hall, or manor house, which was often built as an extension to the existing fortress. In some instances, bastles and tower houses were themselves modified in order to



Hills Tower, Dumfries and Galloway. Standing 10km south-west of Dumfries, this fine tower house was built by Sir Edward Maxwell in the early part of the 16th century. The barmkin wall features a small, attractive gatehouse *c.*1598, which was defended by a wooden door, a yett and two inverted-keyhole shot holes. In 1721, a comfortable Georgian wing was added to the tower, providing more salubrious accommodation for the owner.



provide less austere and more accessible accommodation, whilst others were simply incorporated within farm complexes and given over to storage. Old habits die hard, however, and it should be borne in mind that sporadic lawlessness across the region continued well into the 17th century. In some more remote areas, bastle houses were still being erected as late as 1707.

It should also be acknowledged that a great many Border fortresses, both large and small, owe their survival to Sir Walter Scott, who, in the 19th century, generated a wave of romantic interest in the history of the Borderland that inspired local gentry to initiate enthusiastic programmes of restoration on their castles and towers. Although occasionally of a rather fanciful and dubious nature, such works at least halted further deterioration.

In 1584, a Commission on the Borders reported that 'Warke Castle … standinge on the said river of Tweede … hard adjoininge to the border of Scotland' was 'decaied by want of reparacion', but added that 'this castle or fortresse we doe thincke to be one of the cheife and principall places to defende the country and annoye the enemye if it were repaired.' Shown in the sketch is a 'stonehouse' in the outer ward, and in the inner one a bakehouse, a kitchen and the constable's house. From the roof of the keep there were extensive views across the river Tweed and 'all the boundes of Berwyk'.

VISITING THE SITES TODAY

Many of the region's castles and tower houses have survived as picturesque, partial ruins, whilst others have been well cared for and, even to this day, serve as family seats. A surprising number of bastle houses, albeit greatly modified, still provide family accommodation and numerous fortified churches on both sides of the Border continue to serve their congregations.

Many of these buildings are accessible to the public, and for anyone visiting the Border region there are numerous 'heritage trails' to follow, such as www.thereivertrail.com.

Visitors would do well to acquire the Ordnance Survey map *In Search of the Border Reivers*, which details over 800 sites relating to the history of the Anglo-Scottish Border. Living history events portraying the Border Reivers and their world are held regularly at Old Buittle Tower, near Dalbeattie, in Dumfries and Galloway, and for anyone unable to visit the region in person there are the following VHS/DVDs: *The Border Reivers* (Northern Heritage) and *In Search of the Border Reivers* (Striding Edge Productions).

The following locations marked with an asterisk are accessible to the public:

*__Aydon Castle.__ Fortified manor house from the turn of the 14th century, set above the Cor Burn 0.8km north-east of Corbridge, Northumberland. The castle can be accessed via the B6321. (English Heritage)

*__Black Middens Bastle.__ Situated on a remote hillside in the Tarset valley, close to Bellingham on the B6320, this roofless building is in the care of English Heritage. Nearby are the ruins of three other bastle houses: Shilla Hill, Highfield and Corbie Castle, all of which can be viewed from a public footpath.

Cessford Castle. The ruins of this massive, 15th-century stronghold of the Kerrs stands on a minor road about 1.6km south-west of Morebattle. The castle has spectacular views of the Cheviot Hills and can be viewed from the perimeter of the site, but entry to the interior is forbidden.

*Dunstanburgh Castle. The magnificent ruins of Thomas of Lancaster's Border fortress stand 2.4km north of the fishing village of Craster, on the Northumberland Coast. (English Heritage)

*Church of St John the Baptist, Edlingham. This atmospheric 11th-century church, with its early 14th-century tower, is situated in a quiet valley 8km west of Alnwick, Northumberland, and can be accessed from the B6341. The church is open to the public – a small donation would be appropriate. Edlingham Castle stands nearby.

Elsdon, Redesdale, Northumberland. Best approached by a minor moorland road from Scots' Gap, which passes close to 'Winter's Gibbet'. Both the 16th-century tower house and late 11th-century earthwork dominate the village. The tower is privately owned.

*Greenknowe Tower. This tower house from 1581 is now a roofless ruin but the interior bears close examination. The building, which positively bristles with a variety of gun loops, stands 0.8km west of Gordon on the A6105. (Historic Scotland)

*Hermitage Castle. Surely the most forbidding stronghold in the Border Marches and well worth visiting, the gaunt ruins of 'Th'Armitage' stand in a remote valley in Liddesdale, on the B6399. (Historic Scotland)

*Hollows / Gilnockie Tower. A substantial tower house from the mid-16th century, which stands about 2.5km north of Canonbie off the A7. This former stronghold of the Armstrongs is privately owned, but is open to the public.

*Low Cleughs Bastle. Standing on a hillside above the Rede Valley, this partly ruinous bastle house from the turn of the 17th century has recently been stabilized by Northumberland National Park Authority. The bastle is located on a minor road about 0.8km west of West Woodburn on the A68.

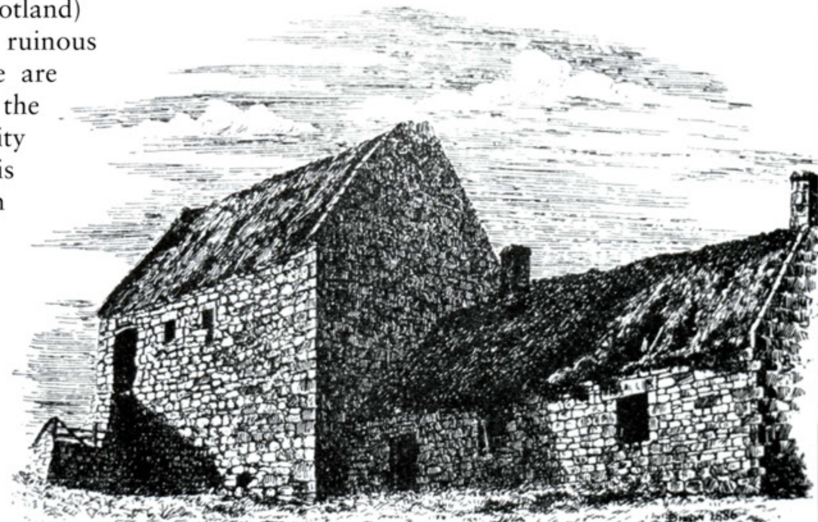
*Norham Castle. Situated midway between Berwick and Coldstream and standing on the steep, south bank of the River Tweed, this rugged old fortress is steeped in Border history. It overlooks the village of Norham on the B6470. (English Heritage)

*Old Gaol, Hexham. Standing opposite the Moot Hall and close to Hexham Abbey, the Old Gaol now houses the recently refurbished Border History Museum and is an essential point of interest for anyone visiting the region.

*Smailholm Tower. This quintessential tower house is situated on Sandyknowe Craigs in the Tweed Valley and encompasses spectacular views of the surrounding countryside and the Eildon Hills. Smailholm stands 10km west of Kelso, close to the B6404 and is accessed through the farmyard at Sandyknowe. (Historic Scotland)

*Thirlwall Castle. Although in a ruinous condition, the remains of the castle are picturesquely situated high above the Tipalt Burn and stand in close proximity to Hadrian's Wall. The castle is approached along a pleasant footpath not far from the B6318.

*Woodhouses Bastle. This restored bastle house can be approached from the B6341 and is delightfully situated on a minor road near Holystone Grange in Coquetdale, Northumberland. There is, however, no access to the interior.



Woodhouses Bastle, 1886. In the 18th century a one-storey cottage was added to the bastle, although both were in ruins when this sketch was made in 1886. Note the doorway to the upper floor of the bastle, now blocked, and the location of what appears to be the two original windows. In latter years it was noted that both buildings were thatched with heather.

Neidpath Castle, Peebles. Perched high above a bend on the river Tweed, this massively constructed tower house was built on an L-plan in the late 14th century by Sir William Hay, Sheriff of Peebles, and consists of three tiers, each covered with a barrel vault. The exterior walls have rounded corners and in the main block enclose five spacious chambers and six smaller storeys in the wing. The entrance was situated in the re-entrant angle of the main block and wing, and from there a spiral staircase rose to the full height of the building to an open wall-walk and parapet.



OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM
Shittleheugh Pele, Otterburn, Northumberland. Now a gaunt and shattered ruin overlooking Redesdale, one of the most turbulent valleys in the Border country, Shittleheugh was a superior kind of bastle and is referred to by the Northumbrian historian Hodgson, as the 'mansion house of the Reeds'. A stone porch stood in front of the ground floor entrance, which is in the long south wall, and the doorway is equipped with tunnels for two drawbars. In latter days military personnel from nearby Otterburn Training Area frequently used Shittleheugh as a recce point and its interior was often scattered with large numbers of spent cartridge cases. Being a 'martiall kind of men' themselves, the Reeds would no doubt have fully approved.

GLOSSARY

Ashlar evenly dressed masonry.
Aumbry wall cupboard or recess.
Barmkin courtyard with an enclosing wall.
Bartizan projecting angle turret.
Corbel stone block projecting from a wall to carry an upper floor or parapet, etc.
Crenellate to furnish with battlements.
Entresol second floor within the ground storey.
Garderobe medieval latrine.
Machicolations openings between corbels through which missiles can be dropped.
Mural built within a wall.
Piscina basin for washing Communion vessels.
Solar private room off the main hall.
Quoins dressed stones at the corners of a building.

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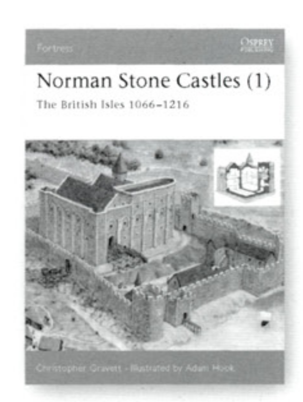


ABOVE At Berwick-upon-Tweed, major new defences were constructed in the 1560s. Designed by Italian military engineers, they incorporated five angle bastions, being arrow-shaped fortifications that extended outwards from massively thick, stone-faced earthworks, which were designed to absorb the impact of incoming shot. At the rear of each bastion were two gun emplacements, which face the open area between them, creating a killing ground over which an attacking force must advance in order to storm the ramparts. How effective these state-of-the-art defences would have proved against an assault remains conjectural as they were never tested. This view from Cumberland Bastion looks east towards Brass Bastion.

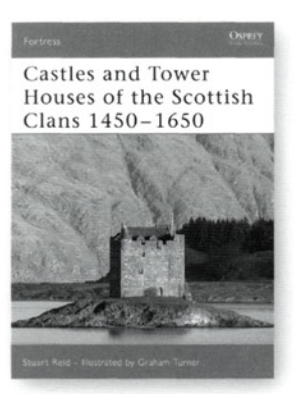
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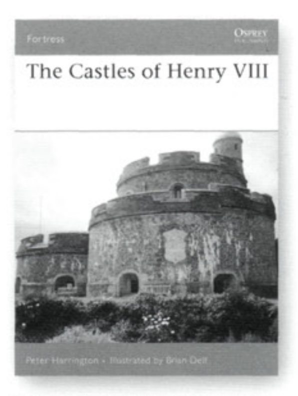
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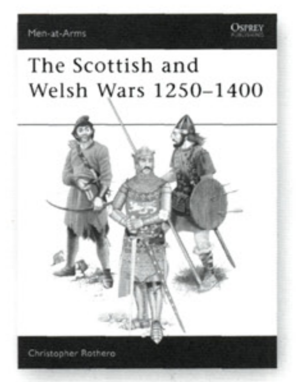
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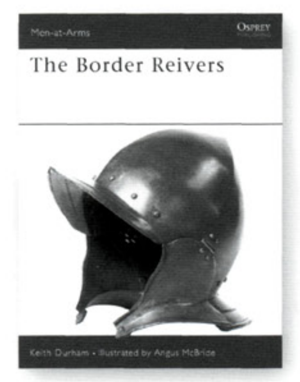
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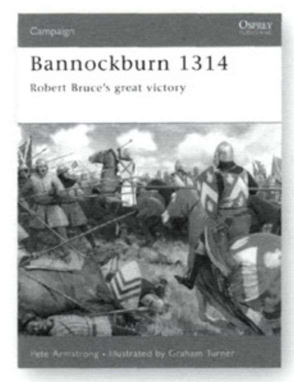
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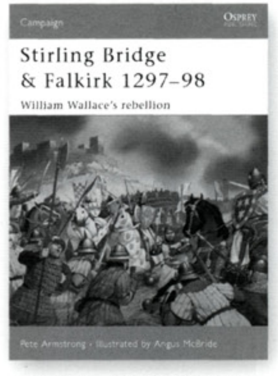
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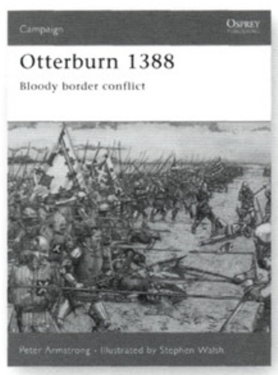
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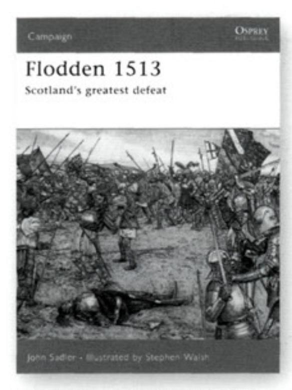
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